MAURICE MAETERLINCK

POET AND PHILOSOPHER

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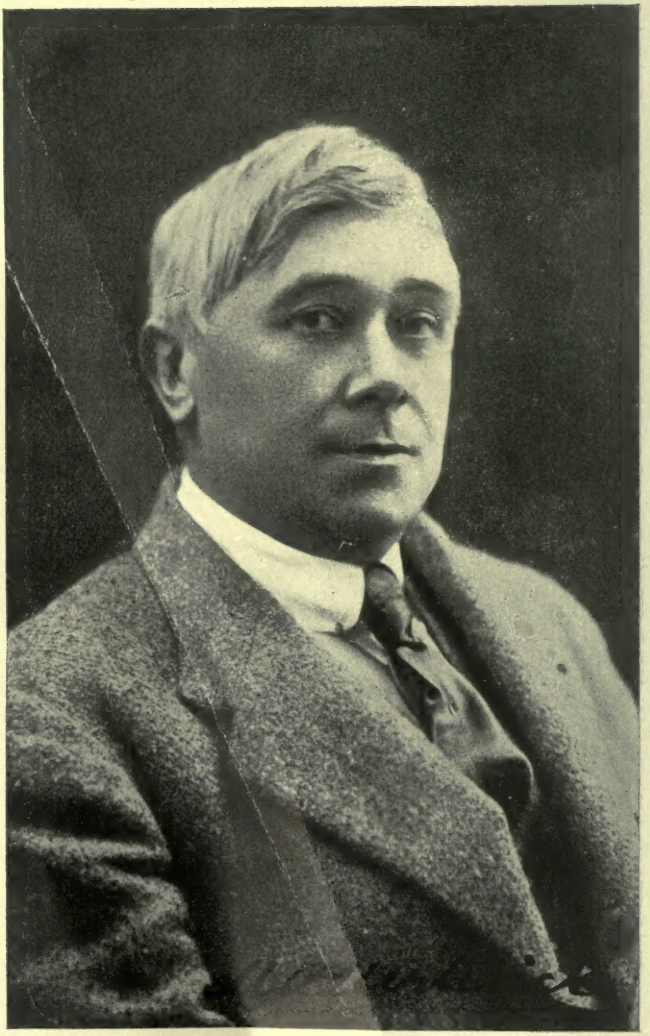

MAURICE MAETERLINCK, 1915.

Maurice Maeterlinck

POET AND PHILOSOPHER

BY

MACDONALD CLARK

WITH PORTRAIT

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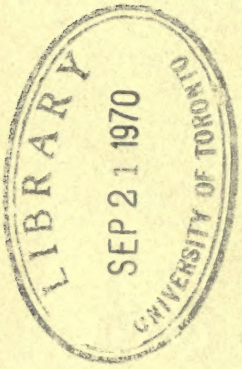

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PREFACE

WHICH of us is there who would not just now do his little best for the glory and honour, as well as for the material well-being, of Belgium, heroic in her struggle against the overwhelming onslaught and tyrannic oppression of a cruel foe, great in strength but not in soul? The gallantry and magnificently united front of what used to be "little" Belgium has shown Germany what inspiration a great soul can put into a small body. Alas, that we have not been able to save Belgium from her bitter fate! Our part now is to act so that the bitterest consequences, annexation and continued domination by our joint enemy, may not also fall to her lot.

She has preserved her soul from the depths of the deadly conflict—may we not help to disseminate her spirit, to spread her teaching far and wide, to create and stimulate the desire among all English-speaking peoples, in every quarter of the globe, the wish to read, learn, and inwardly digest the works of those who bear great names in her literature?

If this essay should rouse or encourage the desire to study the noble works of Maeterlinck at first hand (and that is the only way in which really to appreciate him), it would have amply accomplished its task.

I am glad to have this opportunity of publicly thanking M. Maurice Maeterlinck for the kind and encouraging letter he wrote on first seeing

the MS. of this book, some time ago, and for the ready courtesy with which he agreed to allow a reproduction of a signed photograph of himself to be inserted as frontispiece.

I should like here also to make grateful acknowledgment to Dr. Charles Sarolea and Dr. Otto Schlapp, Lecturers in French and German respectively in Edinburgh University, for the kindly interest they have taken in the preparation of this work, and their help and encouragement throughout.

My cordial thanks are due to Messrs. Allen and Unwin, publishers of most of the authorised translations of Maeterlinck's works, for their generous permission to use translations, made by myself, of short passages from *Le Trésor des Humbles*, *La Sagesse et la Destinée*, *Le Double Jardin*, *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, *La Vie des Abeilles*, *Le Temple Enseveli*, *Joyzelle*, and *Sœur Béatrice*.

MM. Paul Ollendorff and Charles Carrington, publishers in Paris, have also been good enough to permit citations in French respectively from Maeterlinck's Preface to *Annabella* and M. Gérard Harry's book *Maurice Maeterlinck*, in the series "Les Écrivains Français de la Belgique."

The reference to pages throughout is to those of the authorised French or Belgian editions, dated in each case.[1]

MACDONALD CLARK.

[1] Since the above has gone to press, permission has been received from M. Maeterlinck (delayed through his absence in England) to quote the passages mentioned above as translated, in the original French. But, unfortunately, it is now too late to make the changes authorised by M. Maeterlinck.

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MAURICE MAETERLINCK

POET AND PHILOSOPHER

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

I. General Introduction.

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La Pléiade: "Le Massacre des Innocents."

1887. Return to Ghent: *La Jeune Belgique.*

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1892. *Pelléas et Mélisande*: Its appearance at Brussels.

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1898. *La Sagesse et la Destinée* (shows strong effect of Christian teaching).

Maurice Maeterlinck

1901. *La Vie des Abeilles.*
Ariane et Barbe Bleue (shows Maeterlinck's attitude to feminist movement).
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1902. *Monna Vanna* (influenced by Browning's "Luria").
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1903. *Joyzelle* (influenced by Shakespeare's *Tempest*).
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1910. Translation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (Introduction: effect of Shakespeare and other Elizabethans).
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Fondness for outdoor life and for exercise.
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Trend of modern philosophy: Ibsen, Tolstoi, Nietzsche.
Maeterlinck not a disciple of any predecessor.
Decadents and Parnassiens: *vers libres.*
Mingling of pessimism and optimism, of Eastern fatalism and Western mysticism.
Modern trend.

I. General Introduction.

The smallest and the largest country in modern Europe, now united in a desperate struggle for freedom and civilisation against a retardatory and quasi-barbaric might, have had, of recent years, a period of literary productivity almost coincident in time, though somewhat dissimilar in ideal and in expression of that ideal. Both sound the trumpet-call of progress, but each in the manner of its tradition and its aspiration. Through that of Belgium, now bruised, but not broken, in the hands

of a relentless foe, but then active, eager, prospering in all its vital activities, one can hear the rapid rush and swirl of crowded Western civilisation, while the Slav rings with the melancholy of wide, unpeopled spaces, and the slow-stirring weight of mediæval autocracy. The steady, vigorous life of the Fleming, compared with the Latin vivacity of the Walloon (a mixture of French and Spanish), mingle together to produce a race of unique interest no less appealing than that most extraordinary of compounds, the Russian people.

As Tolstoi is the most striking figure in modern Russian literature, Maeterlinck is the most outstanding amongst the notable writers of young Belgium, the Belgium of both Fleming and Walloon, for he partakes of the characteristics of both, and is a striking instance of the composite genius.

Each of these writers is typical of his country and his time, and full of the consistencies and inconsistencies that go to make up a human personality. The changes which seem most sudden and startling when viewed from without are found to be the natural and consequent steps of progressive development when viewed from within, from the point of view of the mind that is evolving.

The evolution of a human soul is always a spectacle of vital interest; when the personality is strong and the changes rapid, the psychological interest becomes more intense. To few literary men has it happened to develop so much in the public gaze as to Maeterlinck.

Maurice Maeterlinck

II. Biography and Works.

Maurice Maeterlinck (or as he called himself in the early days, Mooris Maeterlinck) was born at Ghent on the 29th of August 1862.

He belonged to an old Flemish citizen family which had settled in the fourteenth century at Renaix, near Ghent. His father was a lawyer in Ghent.

The scenery amongst which Maeterlinck spent his early years was that of the Flemish Low Country. His childhood was passed at Oostacker, which stands on the banks of the canal between Ghent and the little Dutch village of Terneuzen.

Maeterlinck went to the Jesuit College of St. Barbe, on the banks of the Lys, at which he met Charles van Lerberghe and Grégoire le Roy, who, along with him, even at that early age, formed a little literary coterie. The three wrote and criticised one another's writings, and the mutual criticism acted as a stimulus to their literary work.

In 1883, Maeterlinck, while still at college, wrote, under the name of "Mater," a little poem entitled "Les Joncs," which Max Waller published, with a critique, in *La Jeune Belgique*.

The same three friends met later at the local university and united once more, along with the great poet Emile Verhaeren, in a literary coterie. At the wish of his parents, Maeterlinck, though already possessed of a strong desire to follow the career of letters, like our own Scott and Stevenson, began to study law. He would have preferred

medicine, or indeed any other science. But he had no choice. On this subject he writes humorously :—

> . . . To study law is to walk about among ruins in a place that is, at the same time, cemetery and building-yard. Building did not appeal to me ; life and thought had more attraction for me.
>
> Having become a barrister, thanks to diplomas, I found myself officially obliged to defend some criminal cases. But murderers, thieves, and incendiaries have radically—at least, those that I have met—a psychology that is merely monotonous and rudimentary ; they furnish specimens of a humanity that often has nothing human about it. I soon tired of that business, to say nothing of the fact that eloquence is not my strong point. The laurels of Cicero did not keep me from sleeping. So one fine day I threw off the toga for ever and took the train for Paris.[1]

In spite of his desire to comply with his family's wishes, a life devoted to letters continued to appeal to Maeterlinck much more strongly than a career consecrated to law, and when he went to Paris in 1886, ostensibly to complete his studies for the bar, it was with the secret hope of making his way in literature. In Paris, beyond his technical studies, he spent some time in reading, in outdoor exercise, in visiting galleries and museums, and increasing his literary acquaintance. He met Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Mikhaël, St. Paul Roux, Catulle Mendès, and others. The first of these, with his curious personality, produced a strong impression on the youthful mind of Maeterlinck, and still stands out as an influence in his memory of those days.

[1] *Les Annales*, 5 mars 1911, p. 232.

Maeterlinck now contributed to *La Pléiade*, as well as *La Jeune Belgique* and other magazines and reviews. *La Pléiade* was a short-lived magazine, founded by Maeterlinck, Grégoire le Roy, and other young literary enthusiasts; it appeared only six times, but contained many things of interest, among others, a vigorous, picturesque, and rather naïve little sketch by Maeterlinck entitled "Le Massacre des Innocents," also a critique of his on the poet Iwan Gwilkin's *La Damnation de l'Artiste*. The former is Maeterlinck's first printed prose work, the latter, his first published criticism. Both are different in style from his later literary productions, and have a crude, youthful immaturity about them. The former seems a pathetic prevision of the massacres of the German occupation of Belgium.

When Maeterlinck returned to Ghent in 1887 he continued for some time to contribute to *La Jeune Belgique*. He came back from his sojourn in Paris more convinced than ever that literature, and not law, was his vocation. His first literary works of importance were already vaguely planned.

He was successful in losing a case entrusted to him at the bar, and in 1889 finally abandoned law. We cannot estimate what the loss to law was, but we know how much literature and philosophy have gained by this decision.

In the same year appeared that strange little volume of poems called *Serres Chaudes*. These are curiously typical of the mystic-melancholy side of Maeterlinck's nature; they seem a paradox when

one remembers his love of vigorous exercise and of sturdy, open-air life. The atmosphere is, as the name indicates, artificial, unwholesome for the healthy human soul to breathe, heavy with pain and anguish, filled with lamentation and fatigue, the soul is too much bowed down even to struggle.

This volume passed almost unnoticed by the public, and it was not till *La Princesse Maleine* appeared, in 1890, that general attention was attracted to the author. A quaint account of its production is given by M. Gérard Harry, in his book on Maeterlinck :—

> *La Princesse Maleine* naquit dans une étable, c'est-à-dire dans un atelier de quelques mètres carrés, où Maeterlinck, avec l'aide d'un ami, l'imprima à vingt-cinq exemplaires, sur une presse à bras dont lui-même tournait la roue.[1]

The influence and atmosphere are unmistakably Shakespearean—Hamlet is writ large through the whole piece, largest at the beginning of it, and Queen Anne would certainly never have existed if Lady Macbeth had not lived.

What wonder, then, that the most notable word in Octave Mirbeau's criticism, which set all literary Europe ablaze, was "Shakespeare"? Yes, *Princesse Maleine* owes its origin to Shakespeare, even more than to that little printing press, but that does not make the "Flemish Shakespeare" of Maeterlinck that Mirbeau would have made. The ideas and ideals of the talented young Belgian on

[1] *Les Écrivains français de la Belgique: Maurice Maeterlinck*, 1909, p. 8.

the subject of the stage were of a genre too radically different from those of the master-dramatist for any one, on serious consideration, to class the names together. But the glowing critique did its work: the reading public of Europe was on fire with excitement to see what the rising author was like, who was "superior to Shakespeare," and had written a tragedy "more tragic than *Macbeth* and more extraordinary in thought than *Hamlet*." Every one read *Maleine*, and every one was seized with strong partisanship for or against the enthusiastic critique.

Maeterlinck himself would have been the last person to link his name with that of Shakespeare, in whose work he was steeped, whom he himself reverenced as inimitable. Proud, shy, sensitive, reserved, modest, he was startled to hear that Europe was ringing with his name. One sees the honest simplicity of his attitude in this fragment of a letter:—

> It seems to me that my poor merit has been singularly exaggerated. . . . You can hardly imagine how painfully I am still groping my way, and I do not know when I shall begin to see.[1]

He had enough of the critical spirit to apply to his own shortcomings as well as to those of others, and he resented the public curiosity of the interviewer. He made his escape from what was really painful to him, and we find him living quietly and personally almost unknown in Paris, while all the world talked of him.

[1] Georges Leneveu, *Ibsen et Maeterlinck.*

Yet, although he considered the excessive praise exaggerated, the warmth of it gave him a certain confidence in going on with his work that he might otherwise have taken some time to gain.

In the following year appeared a book of a very different type: a translation into French of *L'Ornement des Noces Spirituelles*, the work of the old Flemish mystic known as "Ruysbroeck l'Admirable." The choice of this work for study and translation shows the bent of Maeterlinck's mind, always attuned to mysticism. By mysticism we understand in general the study of and inclination to the mysterious in life, more especially in the domain of religious experience.

There are better grounds for calling him—at least so far as his ideas are concerned—a Belgian Emerson, as Mr. James Huneker has done, than a Belgian Shakespeare, after the manner of his earliest and most enthusiastic French critic, M. Octave Mirbeau.[1]

The naturally mystic tendency of Maeterlinck's mind was increased by his studies, and for some time his works show the dominating influence of the mysterious in its various forms—most especially the mysterious that underlies the silent. The inarticulate, the unexpressed, the suggestive possess a fascination for Maeterlinck that the clear, the explained, and the explicable lack in his eyes.

The mystery of Life is ever present with him; his youth was haunted and overshadowed by the mystery of Death. A speaker on Maeterlinck has

[1] From *Bookman*, April 1910, "Maurice Maeterlinck," by Holbrook Jackson, p. 12.

recently suggested that this sense of dread and foreboding throughout his work and that of other Young Belgian writers was an uncanny presentiment of the dreadful fate that was to overtake Belgium in 1914. That dread atmosphere, that weird spirit of foreboding it is that fills *L'Intruse*, *Les Aveugles*, *Les Sept Princesses*, *Intérieur*, and *La Mort de Tintagiles*, and lurks in the other dramas also.

The first three of these appeared in 1891, *L'Intruse* being the most delicate and skilful piece of work, *Les Aveugles* the most complicated (especially if we are to believe all that is said about its elaborate symbolism!), while *Les Sept Princesses* is, to my mind, the drama by Maeterlinck that has least justified its existence, in spite of the wonderful poetry of some of its passages.

L'Intruse is quite outstanding in the history of the drama, as later is *Intérieur* (for a different reason). The title-rôle does not appear among the *dramatis personæ*, yet L'Intruse makes herself felt through every breath that is drawn, through every word that is spoken. No one in that anxious, waiting circle round the lamp feels at first the approach of Death but the old grandfather, who is conscious of every step that the dread intruder draws nearer. In the suggestive questions of the blind old man as to the noise of the scythe, the opening door, the new presence in the room, and in the hesitating, wondering replies, one feels the vague dread stealing through each of the personages; yet they know not what they dread.

It is not till one reaches the end that one realises that the event is of ordinary and everyday occurrence, so much has the hand of the poet idealised the picture, so subtly has he made sentient the mysterious atmosphere.

Maeterlinck begins to show here the real quality of his drama: soul-force rather than action. For the ordinary type of actor and the ordinary type of public, the stage-representation of such a piece was well-nigh impossible. The piece was in its infancy played once by the "Théâtre de l'Œuvre" (a company originated by Camille Mauclair and Lugné-Poë).

In *Les Aveugles* it is to the blind, and blind leaders of the blind, all astray in the dark loneliness of the forest, that Death comes, and here it is not the oldest, but the youngest, that feels its approach. Death has already claimed their leader, whose body is there beside them, though unknown to them, and now they, too, are to be released from the puzzles of Life, but by a force that they dread as much as the world-forces around. There, again, it is the invisible, rather than the visible, that dominates the piece.

In December 1891 *Les Aveugles* was acted once more; it, too, is a piece extremely difficult to reproduce.

Les Sept Princesses is a work of less value, both from the point of view of originality and technique, than the other two dramatic pieces of this year.

In 1892 *Pelléas et Mélisande* was brought out in

Brussels. This drama it was that popularised Maeterlinck in England and America. The story is not a new one, but the background and handling are Maeterlinck's own. The introduction of the child Yniold is something new to the serious French stage, and characteristic of Maeterlinck: children seem to have a fascination for him, and he has a wonderful understanding of the working of the child-mind. The window-scene, in which Yniold plays so large a part, is painfully vivid, rendered still more so by the simplicity of the uncomprehending child.

This piece was acclaimed by a larger public than any drama hitherto produced by the young author.

We still find, at this period, Maeterlinck more startled, and a little more bored, by his rising fame, than he was pleased by it. His constant desire was to escape from public manifestations of personal interest in him. He begged his friends to do what they could to check the intrepid interviewer in his voyages of discovery, and at one time he left for London to escape tiresome curiosity about his personality.

We see the effect of the author's surroundings in the works that follow. In 1894 were produced what he chose to call "Trois Petits Drames pour Marionnettes": *Alladine et Palomides*, *Intérieur*, and *La Mort de Tintagiles*. The first and last of these are symbolical dramas, while of the middle one it has been cleverly said that *Intérieur* is the dramatisation of the essay on "Silence" in *Le Trésor des Humbles*. *Alladine*

et Palomides is a glorification of the love of two, otherwise fairly ordinary, romantic young people, the finest figure in the drama, Astolaine, being the odd third. This contrasts curiously with *Aglavaine et Sélysette*—in which it is the prototype of Astolaine, Aglavaine, the noble and good, who takes the leading part in the duo, after having successfully, though involuntarily, demonstrated that a trio was impossible.

La Mort de Tintagiles has this difference from the foregoing pieces, that it is the child who is the chief figure in it. No more exquisitely touching drama has ever been written. The vain struggle of the helpless little Tintagiles and his brave, devoted sisters, against his inevitable fate, reaches its climax of pathos in the words of the terrified child :—

"Haven't you anything to open with, sister Ygraine? . . . nothing at all . . . nothing at all . . . and I could come through, . . . for I am so little . . . so little . . . you know." [1]

Ygraine's final outburst is a masterpiece of passionate human characterisation.

Another work published in the same year shows the tremendous effect on Maeterlinck of the Elizabethan drama. One cannot read far in his work without coming upon a mention of Shakespeare, and the other Elizabethans are frequently to be met there also. The Introduction to this translation of *Annabella*, by John Ford, shows this influence ; Maeterlinck here pays a warm tribute

[1] *Théâtre*, vol. ii. p. 241.

to his literary predecessors, to those who inspired his first dramatic efforts.

The following year, 1895, brought another translation, and showed again the force of the mystical element in our author. 1891 gave us Ruysbroeck, and 1895 *Les Disciples à Saïs*, and the *Fragments* of the curious, ageless German mystic, Novalis, to whom also Maeterlinck looks as to a guide and helper. Neither work is fully translated; the author chooses those parts which will best suit his purpose.

In his translated work, Maeterlinck shows the sympathy and insight which alone can render the true spirit of a work of genius.

His own country did not appreciate the new talent in her midst; indeed, Maeterlinck and the other young progressive Belgian authors were looked upon with some suspicion, and it happened to more than one of them, as to Maeterlinck, to be refused some small civil post on account of their literary tendencies.

C'était le temps où l'État belge refusait de décorer les écrivains, parce qu'ils n'étaient pas fonctionnaires et refusait d'en faire des fonctionnaires parce qu'ils étaient écrivains.[1]

For some time, then, Maeterlinck resided in Paris, where he had a larger and more appreciative public. He was far from desiring the personal acquaintance and adulation of his admirers; but, as a writer writes to be read, his public influences him almost as much as he in-

[1] *Maurice Maeterlinck*, by Gérard Harry, p. 19, note.

fluences his public, and he requires—especially when he is young and at the beginning of things—a sympathetic and appreciative *milieu*.

Paris stimulated our young author, and we have a succession of noble and characteristic works from his pen; 1896 gave us *Le Trésor des Humbles*—the first of his varied collections of essays which were to make him more popular than his drama—and also *Aglavaine et Sélysette*, which shows a new vein.

Two years later, in 1898, we have *Sagesse et Destinée*, a beautiful and simple exposition of his philosophical outlook: a book which many critics aver is the one by which he will be best remembered.

In all these three we see various influences at work. The change of *milieu* has helped to alter the tragic attitude of the early pieces; the study of the mystics has had its effect; and the influence of the brilliant Madame Georgette Leblanc can be felt throughout all three, as one might expect to find from the dedications on the title-pages of the two volumes of essays. *Sagesse et Destinée* bears a graceful and sincere tribute to the influence which this sympathetic personality had over Maeterlinck, even at that time.

Sagesse et Destinée shows also a strong current of religious feeling. The poetry and moral beauty, as well as the defects, of the Christian legend seem here (as later even more strongly in *Marie Magdeleine*) to rise spontaneously from almost every page.

But Maeterlinck was too great a lover of Nature to continue to be a dweller in towns. His curiously silent, contemplative bent of mind could work best in an atmosphere of external as well as internal peace. When the musical version of *Pelléas et Mélisande* (by De Bussy) and that of *Ariane et Barbe Bleue* (by Dukas) were being arranged for the theatre, and acclaimed on all hands, he left Paris and established himself in new quarters: in winter, at Grasse in Provence, and in summer at the Abbaye de St. Wandrille in Normandy. This fine old Abbaye Maeterlinck saved from vandalism by buying it when it was about to be turned into a chemical factory. It is a beautiful Norman ruin, containing in itself the dramatist's ideal background for many a play: dark old passages and gloomy vaults, windy towers and subterranean chambers, echoing roofs and shadowy, whispering woods, with a still, mysterious pond in their depths. Could the mystery-loving heart of the poet desire more sympathetic surroundings?

That Maeterlinck had studied Nature and natural science to some purpose is shown by his next book, *La Vie des Abeilles*, a poetically scientific work on the bee and its habits. It does not profess to be a scientific treatise. The work is that of the descriptive naturalist who is, at the same time, a poet. The story of the hive-workers is beautifully and sympathetically told, but there is a certain sadness in it, the sadness of the unexplained and inexplicable: that mystery that

Maeterlinck loves to enthrone even above reason and the highest form of intelligence, the mystery that, in the case of the bees, he calls "the Spirit of the Hive," for want of a better name.

The same year (1901) produced also *Ariane et Barbe Bleue* and *Sœur Béatrice*, two dramatic pieces of a different nature from the earlier dramas, and also very unlike one another. *Ariane* is the fairy tale of Blue Beard modernised, and adapted to suit twentieth-century ideas. It shows Maeterlinck's attitude with regard to the emancipation of women: with this movement he is distinctly a sympathiser. Holding the views he does concerning the capacity of women for enlightenment and soul-development, he could hardly be otherwise.

Sœur Béatrice is, as it were, an anticipation of *Marie Magdeleine* on the theme: "Her sins, which were many, are forgiven, for she loved much."

In 1902 appeared *Monna Vanna*, over which there has been more talk than over any other work by its author. It was banned by the censor in England, and consequently excited great public curiosity. Twelve of the most famous English writers signed their names to the protest against this arbitrary proceeding; among these were George Meredith, Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling, Maurice Hewlett, Edmund Gosse, and Arthur Symons. This work is unlike anything hitherto done by Maeterlinck, and was undoubtedly inspired by Browning's "Luria." The background is fifteenth-century Florentine, vivid and picturesque.

The tale, if not accurately historical in the sense of narrating events that actually took place, bears, at least in essence, a sufficient resemblance to the manners of the time to have been true.

In this drama the shadowiness, disappearing in *Aglavaine et Sélysette* and *Ariane*, has quite gone, and there is more of the warmth and movement of life.

The same year produced *Le Temple Enseveli*. In this book Maeterlinck gives his philosophy of life more connectedly and completely than in any of the previous volumes. None of the books mentioned professes to give an entire and reasoned philosophy. In the beginning of *Sagesse et Destinée* we are distinctly warned that *it* does not do so. The prose volumes are all composed of essays of varying lengths, mostly connected with one another. The philosophical thought in *Le Temple Enseveli* is deeper, and the expression of it more vigorous, though perhaps somewhat less graceful, than that of *Sagesse et Destinée*.

In 1903 came *Joyzelle*, as evidently inspired by Shakespeare's *Tempest* as *Monna Vanna* was by "Luria."

Some critics have reproached Maeterlinck for these borrowed inspirations, but the poet replies with the air of him who says: "Je prends mon bien où je le trouve." The greatest writers of all countries, he argues, have written for the world, and their works belong to their readers, as the Bible does. Who would accuse a writer of plagiarism if he drew his inspiration, or his plots, from the

Bible? And Maeterlinck does not consciously derive inspiration without acknowledgment.

In the following year (1904) *Le Double Jardin* appeared: a characteristic and slightly whimsical mingling of essays, such as we find among some of our most graceful English essay-writers. The book is evidently written in varying moods, the beautiful freshness of country and open air breathing through the "Sources du Printemps," "Fleurs des Champs," "Chrysanthèmes," and "Fleurs Démodées," while another sort of Nature-study appears in "Sur la Mort d'un Petit Chien" and "La Colère des Abeilles." "En Automobile" shows a love of perfect mechanism and motion that would do credit to an engineer or a Kipling; there is literary criticism in "Le Drame Moderne," political philosophy in "Le Suffrage Universel," and ethics in "La Mort et la Couronne," "De la Sincérité," and "Les Rameaux d'Olivier."

Another volume of random essays is *L'Intelligence des Fleurs* (1907)—in the beginning a sort of companion treatise to *La Vie des Abeilles*. The former shows Maeterlinck to be as acute an observer of flowers as the latter showed him of bees. The rest of the book contains shorter essays of various sorts, chiefly ethical. In "À propos du Roi Lear" Maeterlinck once more sits at the feet of Shakespeare.

Two years later appeared the work which has enormously increased the popularity of its author in this country, to a far greater extent than it has in France—*L'Oiseau Bleu*. This shows a new side

of our versatile author's genius; it stands alone as a beautiful, fanciful conception built up upon graver, philosophic thought, in a most graceful, picturesque, and pleasing fashion. This piece is, to all appearance, a fairy play for children, a refined and beautiful pantomime of the most exquisite sort, rather reminiscent of J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan,* but more delicate and subtle. Beneath the surface it is far more than a pretty child-play. Maeterlinck's work is so much of a unity that on reading *L'Oiseau Bleu* one pauses to consider how far it embodies or what it adds to his philosophy, and one hears throughout the echo of the gospel of simplicity and inwardness: the doctrine that it is inwardly and not outwardly, at home and not abroad, that man must seek his real happiness—the happiness of the sage, not of the adventurer.

The staging of this drama required such elaborate scenery and machinery that it was with difficulty that Maeterlinck could induce any theatre-director to take it up. For long it was not played either in France or Belgium, but it was speedily translated into several European languages, and very soon after its publication, played in Russia, to the great financial benefit of the theatre in which it was acted.

In this country, Mr. Teixeira de Mattos translated the play into English, and Mr. Herbert Trench arranged it for the stage.

It was played in the Haymarket Theatre in London for over two hundred successive evenings,

and was acclaimed enthusiastically in every other town in Britain in which it was acted, meeting with ovations in Edinburgh whenever it was represented. M. Maeterlinck himself was present at the final rehearsal at the Haymarket Theatre, and was startled by the enthusiasm with which the privileged audience wished to greet him in person after showing its approval *en masse*. Indeed, so much alarmed was his natural timidity by these signs of personal enthusiasm that he refused to appear at the first really public representation of his popular piece.

In 1910 Maeterlinck completed a translation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* for his wife, who conceived the idea of acting it realistically in the Abbaye de St. Wandrille—the audience being intended to follow the actors from point to point. Although there were necessarily some grotesque little catastrophes in this novel way of rendering a play, yet the effect, on the whole, was successfully realized. Maeterlinck himself was long very doubtful of the advisability of the scheme, but we are grateful to Mme. Leblanc-Maeterlinck for her idea, as it has secured for us a masterly translation of *Macbeth* into French. It is a common truism to say that it requires a poet to translate a poet, but the inner truth of the statement is strongly impressed on one in reading this translation, when one realises that there are subtleties in *Macbeth* that even Maeterlinck's genius has not been able to render.

The translation itself is a remarkably fine piece

of work, but even more valuable for the student of Maeterlinck is the Introduction, which strikes the same note as the Introduction to *Annabella*: the treasure of lyric and dramatic beauty to be found in Shakespeare and his contemporaries, an inexhaustible store of riches for poets of all time. Elsewhere [1] Maeterlinck says that the so-called French romanticism comes from a false interpretation of Shakespeare, which explains why the romantic theatre of 1830 can hardly be said to exist now.

The next work we have from the pen of M. Maeterlinck is *Marie Magdeleine*, a curious drama, with a noble simplicity about it, skilfully constructed and bearing a certain reverence for the dominant personality in it: that of Jesus Christ, whom one hears merely as a voice, and does not see at all.

On reading this piece (only acted as yet in Berlin), one is inclined to ask if Maeterlinck has changed his earlier views on Christianity, so much does he seem to be under the influence of the Founder of it. Divine inspiration, total difference from ordinary men, seem to be admitted. Is it only for the purposes of the play? The continuous unity of the Maeterlinckian whole contradicts the suggestion of the author's holding the orthodox Christian belief.

Marie Magdeleine only appeared in its original French in March 1913, although German and English translations had been current for over two years.

[1] In *Les Annales*, 5 mars 1911.

During 1911 Maeterlinck was given the Nobel Prize for literature. This award marks, in an interesting way, his European reputation.

La Mort was published in French in February 1913. It had appeared in October 1911 in an abridged English dress, and in full in October 1913. Mr. Teixeira de Mattos was again the translator. This work is an expansion of the essay on " Immortality," in *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*. It is purely speculative and very suggestive for those who have followed out Maeterlinck's philosophy to this point. *La Mort* contradicts any suggestion there may have been in *Marie Magdeleine* of a leaning towards the Christian creed: it is frankly agnostic, and its speculations are distinctly antipathetic to those of orthodox Catholicism. For the last two years Maeterlinck's contributions to literature have been mainly articles in French, English, or American magazines.

III. Personality and General Outlook.

In springing from a mixture of races, one runs the risk of the highest and the lowest: one may be at either end of the scale with all the virtues, or all the vices, of each racial element. Such a mingling may, and often does, produce a genius, as it has done in the case of Maeterlinck. He has the restful and contemplative calm of the ancient Flemish thinkers, and the fulness and richness of vision of the Flemish artist. Add to that the Southern qualities of the Walloon which make

Maeterlinck appeal supremely to the public of Paris: passion, now slumbering, now alert and in full course; the keen, critical eye of the student and lover of humanity; ready insight and quick sympathy; the whole joined to an exquisite facility of expression and mastery of the most musical French prose, and a conscious audacity in dramatisation. He unites the mysticism of the North with the clear expression of the Roman-born tongues; the lyrical power of the Teuton with the limpidity of the Latin.

Such is his heritage; but there are none who have not the defects of their qualities. We shall see his limitations, as we examine his works more closely.

Heredity does much for us, but it is an open question whether heredity or environment plays the greater part. The years of Maeterlinck's training mingled the same elements as his descent. The quiet, slow-moving Flemish town, alternating with the peaceful beauty of the Flemish landscape beyond the town, could not fail to affect the mind of the impressionable child; the wide-rolling, melancholy plains, the winding, ship-filled canals, the heavy, brooding skies overhead, the gentle melancholy pervading the whole, encouraged his natural tendency to quiet, solitary habits, so that his love of solitude and silence became almost a passion. The great ships that constantly came up the navigation canals, and seemed to sail right into the family garden, so close did they pass, always connected him with the sea. In his dramas, the

sound of the sea is never far off, and it generally has in it a sombre suggestion of irrevocability.

The Jesuit College, at which Maeterlinck received his early training, gave a religious aspect to his education: many of his comrades becoming straightway members of the priesthood on leaving it. Maeterlinck rebelled against the rigidity and over-narrowness of the Jesuit rules, and the feeling of oppression, from which he suffered at college [1] (a feeling that, as Madame Maeterlinck tells us, still embitters his recollections of his childhood), doubtless started in him, earlier than would otherwise have happened, a critical attitude towards religious observances, and, through them, the religion on which they are based. His mind did not incline churchwards, any more than towards the law. The poet and philosopher in him were actively demanding fulfilment of their destiny.

Maeterlinck is not one of those who love to mix freely with their fellow-men. His is not the social imagination; he does not draw inspiration from the swift, crowded whirl of the city; the hum of thronging life awakes no answering chord in his heart. He shuns the crowd that Browning would have loved, he prefers a Tennysonian solitude. His genius is reflective: noise deadens it, while silence stimulates it. The words on one of the walls of the Abbaye de St. Wandrille, might, as M. Gérard Harry [2] suggests, be Maeterlinck's own motto:—

O beata solitudo,
O sola beatitudo!

[1] Introduction to *Maurice Maeterlinck: Morceaux Choisis* (Nelson).
[2] *Maurice Maeterlinck*, by Gérard Harry, p. 21.

"Silence and Secrecy" appeal to Maeterlinck as much as to Carlyle, although in a somewhat different way. Carlyle has all the impatience of verbiage of the rugged and taciturn Scot; so strongly does he share Hamlet's dislike for "Words, words, words," that he is almost ready to build an altar to the God of Silence. Maeterlinck begins, as it were, where Carlyle leaves off, and so mystic is his idea of Silence, that the thoughts therein are like winged spirits, bearing the real ego of the man, for all to read who comprehend his silence.

Maeterlinck's love of silence rather than of words, of the revelation of soul-states rather than of complicated actions and stirring passions, is the outcome of his tendency towards the simple and natural, coupled with his characteristic reserve. He has a certain aloofness of attitude; and, while desiring that men should live frankly and sincerely with each other, he yet considers that there are regions of the spirit into which no other man dare enter: every one has a right to possess his own soul.

In accordance with his love for the simple and natural, a well-developed physical frame is to him a necessity; it is the *mens sana in corpore sano* that appeals most strongly to him. Of a vigorous constitution by nature, he has taken pleasure all his life in bodily exertion and exercise: boating, cycling, boxing, fencing, and motoring have been among his pleasures.

The very names of some of his essays show his love of outdoor life and exercise: "En Auto-

mobile,"[1] "Éloge de l'Épée,"[2] "Éloge de la Boxe."[3] Coupled with this is a very keen love of Nature and knowledge of its facts and workings. Maeterlinck has a somewhat scientific bent of mind, of the type that seeks after truth and evidence. He welcomes any new thing that bears truth in it, or any fact that verifies an old position. He is a keen observer as well as a speculative philosopher. One of his most popular books, *La Vie des Abeilles*, shows his attitude with regard to scientific truths, as well as his actual kindliness of disposition towards the lower animal creation. Of the last-mentioned, he has selected the dog for special eulogy, while his views with regard to other animals are unique and interesting. He finds a vast amount of intelligence in bees, and even in the fixed forms of plant-life.

He has written very interestingly on the social question, and some of the problems it presents, but he does not discuss the matter very fully.

His sympathies are with all that makes for progress. He would have the world-soul enriched by the contribution of every eager, developing individual human soul, and not impoverished by the dwarfing and stunting of those that cannot have scope.

Maeterlinck holds that this present epoch is one of rapid advance; the progress of the last hundred years, he asserts, is greater than that made during a thousand former centuries together. The de-

[1] In *Le Double Jardin.* [2] Ibid.
[3] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs.*

velopment of science as well as of physical research has quickened the pace.

Maeterlinck's grasp of philosophy is wide; he touches it both where it merges into science and into the purely spiritual region. The union of these two strong forces, the scientific and the spiritual, will, he considers, give the greatest possible impetus toward the field of the unknown and the mysterious, that he deems it man's business to conquer. These forces are daily growing stronger in the modern world, and when we can all use them as we should the new epoch will be at hand.

In the modern philosophical arena, Ibsen, Tolstoi, Nietzsche have each dominated one field; the gospels of revolt, of altruism, of egoism, have each their place in progress; we must learn to blend the developing forces of change, of socialism, of individualism, so as to produce in the end the ideal type, the man of the future.

Maeterlinck claims the liberty, in philosophy as in poetry, to follow any or none of those who have gone before him; the work of those who have written for the world is the world's property, he would say, and their successors have the right of heirs to make what use of it they will. He does not choose to be bracketed with any school of poetry or philosophy.

That he and his friends of the *Pléïade* and *La Jeune Belgique* were a united group, reactionary to the cold and correct classicism of the Parnassiens, is an undoubted fact, but Maeterlinck stands apart from the others of the group in originality

of type, of production, while far outrunning them in quality and depth of thought. The group to which he belonged early earned for itself the name of "Decadents," partly on account of apparent want of form, as contrasted with the Parnassiens—they use the *vers libres* and form a sort of parallel to the Walt Whitman group—partly on account of their somewhat morbid, *fin-de-siècle* view of the world. Emile Verhaeren, who is really the greatest *poet* of Belgium, must not be included in statements concerning the other "Young Belgian" writers: he stands high above the rest.

So difficult have some critics found it to pigeonhole and label Maeterlinck, and have done with him comfortably, that some actually dub him a pessimist, others prefer to call him an optimist, and one ingenious American, too much puzzled by either category, suggests, as a *pis-aller*, the term "bonist." What are we to make of such a complicated label?

The fact is neither puzzling nor unusual. In the early days, Maeterlinck tended to show a certain morbidness and pessimism in his work, because he was always struggling towards an explanation of the unknown. Had he been content to flutter on a lower plane, with no desire to rise into the realms of mystery, the sense of struggle with the unknown and (apparently) inexplicable would not have been so present, nor made his work savour so much of melancholy: a shallow optimism of satisfaction on the lower planes would have been his. Then he might have won for himself in the

eyes of the superficial the term "optimist," which would never have been his by right of conquest, as it is now. Maeterlinck has, in his early work, an almost Eastern sense of fatalism, with this of difference: that his fatality has in it nearly always the impulse to struggle and to resist even against overwhelming odds, and knowing the inevitable result, whereas the Eastern accepts his fate with bowed head and folded hands. Ygraine, in *La Mort de Tintagiles,* is typical of Maeterlinck's attitude before the seemingly inexorable. Is it not, in miniature, Belgium's struggle for life to-day?

As well as to the Eastern fatalist, Maeterlinck is akin to the Western mystic. He has learnt from Ruysbroeck, Novalis, Emerson, Carlyle, of whom he is an acknowledged follower. Later, we shall note the tribute that he pays them. He regards them as his masters in philosophy, and confesses his debt generously, as none but a great mind can. That he early felt his mind in touch with theirs is shown by the translation of Ruysbroeck and Novalis appearing among his first works. It is interesting to remark that Maeterlinck describes himself as *un esprit qui se laisse aller au mystère.*

There is no doubt that, in Western Europe, he is and will be considered as an original type of philosopher and poet, forming the most curious and interesting blend of the spirit of the past and present: a modern of the moderns in outlook, with inspiration drawn from the old and new Germanic mystics and from the Elizabethan dramatists. He shows the trend of certain forces of modern times

somewhat as Ibsen does, only rather less strongly and far less bitterly, and somewhat as Tolstoi, only less dogmatically.

Unfortunately, he sometimes weakens a strong position by failing to bring up his strongest argument to defend it, and occasionally by making an appeal to the emotions instead of to the intellect. Such instances, however, are rare, and the general argument is displayed with peculiar lucidity and truthfulness.

CHAPTER II

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

I. First Period: Gloom, Mystery, Pessimism.
Works: Early Sketches, *Serres Chaudes* to *Trésor des Humbles*.
Description of Works. Reason for gloom.
Beginning of struggle towards light.
Résumé of outlook of first period.

II. Bridge between First and Second Period.
Le Trésor des Humbles.
Study of Mystics (Plotinus, Ruysbroeck, Novalis, Emerson, Carlyle) and its effect.

III. Second Period: Light and Hope. Almost Sudden Optimism.
Works: *Aglavaine et Sélysette* to *Joyzelle*.
Character of Aglavaine.
Attitude of *Sagesse et Destinée*; insistence on character.
Study of science in search of truth.
Outline of *Vie des Abeilles*.
Life and character in *Monna Vanna*, *Ariane et Barbe Bleue*, *Marie Magdeleine*.
Outline of *Ariane et Barbe Bleue*, *Sœur Béatrice*, *Monna Vanna*, *Temple Enseveli*, and *Joyzelle*.
Change of attitude.
Résumé of outlook of second period.

IV. Third Period: Less Brilliant Optimism. Suggestion of Compromise.
Works: *Le Double Jardin* to *La Mort* and *Marie Magdeleine*.
Description of *Le Double Jardin* and *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*.
Reaction from pessimism: middle course.
Closer touch with ordinary life.
Outline of *L'Oiseau Bleu*, *Sagesse et Destinée*, and *Marie Magdeleine*.
La Mort.
Résumé of outlook of third period.

If one picked up at random, say, *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, and *Serres Chaudes*, one would have

difficulty in believing they came from the same hand, so entirely different is the tone of Maeterlinck's later from that of his earlier work. It is not merely the style of expression, nor even the type of work that has changed; the tone, the outlook on life, are completely altered. At a superficial reading, one would say a different man.

If we examine carefully the works in chronological order, we shall see how the changes show themselves, and how the works fall naturally into groups or periods.

I

What characterises the first period is its extreme gloom, its apparently pessimistic outlook. It is filled also with a penetrating sense of mystery, of things unknown and seemingly unknowable. This atmosphere does not belong to the first period alone; it pervades all the Maeterlinckian writings, only, as the philosopher himself says, it is important for us that the mystery should sometimes change its place. During this period the chief mystery that Maeterlinck finds weighing down and crushing the soul of man is Death, and Pain and Sorrow generally accompany it.

The first period includes *Serres Chaudes*, the first volume of the *Théâtre* (comprising *La Princesse Maleine*, *L'Intruse*, and *Les Aveugles*); *Les Sept Princesses*; the second volume of the *Théâtre* (comprising *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Alladine et Palomides*, *Intérieur*, and *La Mort de Tintagiles*); and the

three translations, characteristic of Maeterlinck's catholicity of interest: two from the mystics, one from the Elizabethan drama: Ruysbroeck's *Ornement des Noces Spirituelles*, Novalis's *Les Disciples à Saïs* and *Fragments*, and Ford's *Annabella*.

Serres Chaudes is a little volume of poems that are practically all experiments in verse-forms. Maeterlinck and the small school of poets he gathered round him experimented in *vers libres*. The results, on the whole, are not very happy, from the point of view either of subject or style. The poems are the confused dreams of the fevered brain; the atmosphere is stifling, as the title suggests. An intense weariness pervades the whole. This verse, from "Serre d'ennui," is typical of the feeling of most of the poems in the book:—

> O cet ennui bleu dans le cœur!
> Avec la vision meilleure,
> Dans le clair de lune qui pleure,
> De mes rêves bleus de langueur![1]

The "Quinze Chansons" (at first "Douze Chansons"), which were afterwards added to the *Serres Chaudes*, are infinitely more successful. There is more definiteness of purpose as well as more grace of form in them. Some are extremely musical. Others, however, have the fantastic wildness of the *Serres Chaudes*. Some of the chansons are collected from the plays, such as that from *Sœur Béatrice*; others suggest the plays by their

[1] *Serres Chaudes*, p. 13.

context or phrasing; for instance, IX and X both breathe the spirit of *L'Intruse*:—

> L'Inconnue embrasse la reine,
> Elles ne se dirent pas un mot
> Et s'éloignèrent aussitôt.
>
> . . . . .
>
> Son époux pleurait sur le seuil,
> On entendait marcher la reine,
> On entendait tomber les feuilles.[1] (IX)

Princesse Maleine, through which Maeterlinck sprang into sudden European fame, thanks to Octave Mirbeau, owes its Hjalmar to Hamlet, its Angus to Horatio, its Anne to Lady Macbeth, its fool to the fool in *King Lear*, and Maleine's nurse to that of Juliet. It is the outcome of a young mind steeped in Shakespeare. Poor little Princess Maleine is separated from her betrothed, Hjalmar, through a quarrel between their respective parents, and is shut up by her father in a tower. When, at last, she and her nurse manage to make their escape from it, war has devastated the land, the Royal Family is among the slain, and Maleine and the nurse are homeless wanderers. They stray into Hjalmar's country and find the young Prince betrothed to Uglyane, daughter of the wicked Anne, who has now almost complete ascendancy over the mind of the weak old King. When Maleine's identity is at length revealed, Anne vows vengeance on her for upsetting her wedding plans for her daughter, and finally induces the old King to assist

[1] *Serres Chaudes*, p. 112.

her to murder the poor little sick Princess. Young Hjalmar, mad with grief and rage, slays Anne and then himself, and the King's tottering reason is quite overthrown. The play is strange, and in places ghastly, without being impressive; in others, turbulent, without being strong. It belongs clearly to a period of youthful exuberance.

The other two plays in this first volume of the *Théâtre* are both strong, and original in plan and execution. There is no plot in either, and only one scene, representing rather the result of circumstances than the circumstances themselves, except for the finale. They are both like last acts of plays of vigorous mind-painting, especially in the relation of mind to the unknown. In *L'Intruse*, an anxious family awaits tidings of the sick mother, from the nurse who is attending her: they sit in the outer room and listen for every sound. Gradually, the nightingales hush outside, a sound of the sharpening of a scythe is heard (by those who have ears to hear it), and a chill presence is felt. The old blind grandfather is the first to hear the coming of the Intruder, and to feel what it means. As he questions the younger people around him, the presence that has revealed itself to his sensitive blindness takes conscious shape for the reader, who wonders at the tragic obtuseness of the dying woman's husband, brother, and children. We do not need the nurse to tell us, in the end, that Death has visited the house.

The same weird suggestion pervades *Les Aveugles*. A group of blind men and women

of varying ages are astray in the loneliness of a wood, the priest on whom they depended for guidance lying, all unknown to them, dead in their midst. They wonder he does not come to take them home again, and, as they wait, they relate various incidents in their narrow, bounded life, and express their hopes and fears for their homeward journey. The group is an excellent medley of different types of human nature, the extreme selfishness of personal fear mingling with kindly and generous recollections of the goodness of the missing priest. It is the women who have most faith in his desire to help them (in spite of his sometime uncertainty of utterance), and in his ultimate return to lead them home. In *L'Intruse*, the inner vision of approaching Death is given to the old man; in *Les Aveugles*, to the young woman and the child of the mad woman. This is quite characteristic of Maeterlinck's attitude. It is one of the men who discovers the dead body of the priest, but it is left for one of the women to discover the approach of Death itself to that already stricken group.

The piece is powerful. It is broadly symbolic of human Life and moral blindness, but it is not the detailed allegory critics would have it. *Les Sept Princesses* is very slight in comparison. Seven poor little princesses are asleep at sunset, shut up in a glass-house, which might have been one of the *Serres Chaudes*. They are under the charge of the old King and Queen, and to them comes the young Prince, grandson of the royal pair. When at last the Prince awakens them from sleep, the

one he loves, Ursule, is found to be dead amidst the rest.

The most striking note in *Les Sept Princesses* is the feeling of the sea and its suggestion of separation. The melancholy and rhythmic cadence of the sailors' voices as they sail away gives a lyrical touch to the piece. The cry of "L'Atlantique! l'Atlantique!" recalls Heine's—

> Thalassa! Thalassa!
> Sei du gegrüsst, du ewiges Meer!

The drama that followed this slight effort is the one by which Maeterlinck is best known in this country: *Pelléas et Mélisande*. The tale is somewhat that of Paolo and Francesca over again, Pelléas being Paolo; Mélisande, Francesca; and Golaud, Giovanni Malatesta. Golaud has found Mélisande wandering in a wood, taken her away with him and wedded her. Some time after their marriage they return to the gloomy castle of Golaud's grandfather, Arkel, who along with Geneviève, mother of Golaud and Pelléas, is very kind to the strange little Princess. Mélisande's stepson, Yniold, soon becomes attached to her. Pelléas, detained at home by the illness of his father, reluctantly makes friends with Mélisande, and from that day the two find they have more in common than have Mélisande and Golaud. The latter's jealousy is aroused, and he uses Yniold as an instrument to discover whether there is a secret between the two younger people. In a fit of jealous rage he takes Mélisande and Pelléas by surprise in the

wood, and kills Pelléas. Shortly after, Mélisande dies in the castle, surrounded by the melancholy household, leaving behind her a frail little child to take her place.

Arkel is the sanest figure in the piece—again an old man. He and Mélisande seem to understand each other, and his is the dominating influence in the old castle. Pelléas is somewhat of a youthful Romeo, Golaud savours a little too much of the stage villain. The porter scene is obviously influenced by *Macbeth*.

Alladine et Palomides has something of the same flavour as *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Alladine is a young girl, loved by the old King Ablamore, while Palomides is pledged to wed the old King's daughter, Astolaine. Alladine and Palomides become fascinated with one another, to the exclusion of others, and though Palomides tries to assure himself and Astolaine, as, later, Méléandre seeks to assure Aglavaine and Sélysette, that three people can love mutually as well as two, the attempt ends in failure. Astolaine is bravely unselfish. Her father, angry on her account as well as on his own, at the treachery of the two others, has them thrown into a cave, from which they are extricated with difficulty, after enjoying the imagined beauty at first, and then finding the horror of the position. The treatment has been too rigorous, and both die.

There is little plot in this drama; the piece draws its beauty from its glorification of love.

Intérieur, the next drama in the volume, is the strongest and most original piece of work in it.

It is very brief. A family has suffered the loss of the eldest daughter by drowning, and the crowd is bringing home the body. A stranger and an old man have come to break the news to the family, the members of which are seen through their windows, as they sit at their quiet evening avocations, and the two bearers of evil tidings have not the courage to enter, till first one, then another of the grand-daughters of the old man urges them on, as the crowd is now at hand with the girl's body. From the outside one sees the peaceful family, happy in its fancied security, then come the shock and the gathering sorrow, a simple picture of life as it is lived every day. The setting is picturesque and original, and the treatment has the natural grace bestowed by the perfect artist.

The final piece in the second volume of the *Théâtre* is *La Mort de Tintagiles*, an exquisite tragedy. The hero and victim (Tintagiles) is a little boy, brother of two devoted sisters, Ygraine and Bellangère, who try to save him from his fate, from being the prey of the evil Queen, another personification of Death. The two sisters and Aglovale, an old servant, make a gallant fight for the child, but in vain. In spite of their stratagem, Tintagiles is carried off as they all sleep, and no tears, no prayers, no violence, no submission on the part of the heroic Ygraine can bring him back. Ygraine stands for all human nature's rebellion against Death, passionate, violent, yet of no avail!

The other three works belonging to Maeterlinck's first period are the three translations, two from

the mystic philosophers, the third a rendering of the Elizabethan playwright Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. Maeterlinck writes most illuminating Prefaces to all three. Ruysbroeck's *Ornement des Noces Spirituelles* is a curious glimpse into old-time mystic theology. It has a wonderful quality of imagination, while it is, at the same time, cut-and-dried and parcelled out carefully under its different heads.

Novalis's *Les Disciples à Saïs* and *Fragments*, are also the work of a mystic, but of a very different type. The thought is rather riper, but the work is more formless. The main importance for us of these two treatises is that the influence on Maeterlinck was very great. They kept the trend of his philosophic thought towards mysticism.

The third translation, *Annabella*, shows another quality of Maeterlinck's mind, and another of his interests. He was deeply steeped in English literature of the Elizabethan age, and he held Ford to be, after Shakespeare, one of its chief exponents. The rush of life, the fullness and beauty of the lyrical stream caused to flow in Maeterlinck what his mystical philosophy alone would, in all probability, have allowed to lie dormant. The purely human beauty of those old Elizabethans sets off as a foil the spiritual rapture of the mystics, and the three translations together go to complete a period curiously rich and full, in variety of subject and in manner alike.

Maeterlinck's dramatic personages in his own plays form a strange contrast to the full-blooded

men and women of Ford's play. The shadowy, visionary figures of the dramas seem to make their moan to the inexorable; the poor little heroines, come from no one knows where, disappear, after a brief life of shadow, into a still gloomier shadow beyond. Do we know these strange beings at all? Do we not all feel something in us akin to them? It is so much the primitive soul in us all that these characters represent: the uncultured, untrained embryo, not yet freed from its primal instincts. It is the human soul, standing, naked and shivering, before the great, unknown, terrible forces of the universe. It knows not whence to draw its courage, and it quavers forth, in its pathetic darkness and loneliness, its blindness and its dread. Hope there seems to be little, and faith and trust in the ultimate goodness of things *none*. The *falsche Mächte* that Wallenstein ascribes to the underworld seem to rule here.

Is man, then, to submit unconditionally to these—to this chance that seems so arbitrary, so unreasoning, so non-moral? This constantly recurs as a problem in Maeterlinck's work. In the first period, the answer is vague and indefinite in general. Where it seems to approach any clearness, the response is gloomy, sombre, charged with human pain and tragedy. Man is a prey to the evil and sorrow of the world; yield he must, for they are stronger than he. But human life, though weighed down with grief, will not readily bow the knee to death, without a struggle, ineffectual though, in her heart, she knows it to be. So does the fever-stricken

man in *Serres Chaudes,* so does poor little Princess Maleine, struggle, only to realise, in the end, that it has all been in vain.

One note of courage and hope sounds faintly through all the frenzied despair : the prophetic note of love triumphant in the end ; but the end seems very far away.

In the first period, the author appears to be feeling blindly, anxiously, for a solution to the puzzling questions of Life and Death. It is the dream of a strongly imaginative soul, that refuses to be satisfied with the priggishness and insipidity of the orthodox and conventional view of life, that is groping and struggling its way through darkness and tragedy to light : a soul that has not yet found itself.

Maeterlinck has been reproached for the gloom and tragedy of those earlier works ; but who, that understands anything of human nature, does not know that it is the very youth and immaturity of the highly imaginative mind that turn, in pensive temperaments, to gloom, at the very image of the smallness of man in the vastness and mystery of the universe, while in other natures, more militant, the youthful exuberance rushes into battle, swift and impetuous, and only stops to long for more fields to conquer? The very action keeps the spirit bold, hoping ever for triumph, without thinking of the almost insurmountable obstacles. Maeterlinck's mind is rather of the first, that is, the less impulsive, more keenly sensitive type. The facts of life, and the great mystery lying around these

facts, seem, in those early years, to beat in heavily on that sensitive mind, and every stroke leaves a strong impression.

Gloom and tragedy, then, mark the early work, the sadness of the imperfect and undeveloped, of the partial that seeks after completion of the inquiring mind, baffled by the universal mystery.

But the very spirit that is sorrowful because it is baffled, that is tragic because it is overwhelmed with the mysterious terror of the universe, that knows itself imperfect and undeveloped, because it has enough of spiritual vision to have imagined the great whole—that very spirit will have the power to struggle forward to a nobler, more steadfast conception of being, towards some solution of the problem that will, if it does no more, at least act as a calming, and it may be guiding, influence. The sensitive, imaginative soul it is that, having felt keenly the weight of the unsolved mystery and tragedy, will have the strongest motive for struggling to victory and peace.

It is, therefore, no unexpected development in Maeterlinck, that, from the oppressive gloom of his earlier work, with its wonderful flashes of revelation breaking through ever and anon, he steps to serener air, and by degrees becomes, not only a non-pessimistic philosopher, but one of our noblest optimists, breathing forth something of the vigour and freshness of Robert Browning's cheerful and hopeful doctrine. It is by no fortuitous circumstance that Maeterlinck has become one of the most progressive

optimists of our day. It is his own inner determination to struggle towards peace of mind for himself and for others that arms him for the fray. He begins to look boldly at the terrors of the world, and to realise, as so many have done, that a terror, bravely faced, soon ceases to be a terror. Physical and even mental pain can be overcome by fortitude, and Death, the beating of whose dread wings was ever and anon heard in *Princesse Maleine*, *L'Intruse*, *Tintagiles*, does not need to master Life. If Life is fleeting, Death is even more so, and is, after all, only an incident in Life, which has conquered many untoward incidents ere it reaches Death.

So the very effort to attain tranquillity brings with it, at least, some of the peace it seeks, and so strong and swift is its determined flight, that it hardly pauses at the common rest-houses of resignation, renunciation, and self-sacrifice, but sweeps on triumphantly to the final happiness of hopeful calm.

II

At the end of the first period, we find Maeterlinck, then, in a transition stage, passing from the early pessimism to the later optimism. The book that marks this passing, that is, as it were, a bridge between the first and second periods, is *Le Trésor des Humbles*. It is interesting to note all the influences at work

to produce such a book, after what had preceded it. We have seen, for one thing, Maeterlinck's determination not to sink into hopeless pessimism. To keep his face turned in this direction, he was aided by the study of the mystics. We have noted the translations of Ruysbroeck and Novalis that appeared, parallel with the dramas of the first period. These writers, along with Plotinus and others of the mystical school, Maeterlinck had been studying closely during his first period of literary activity. It is in the second period that their influence begins to make itself evident. These philosophers, with their keen spiritual insight and their mystic touch upon the unseen world, gradually had their effect upon the young, imaginative poet-philosopher, with his longing for a philosophy that would satisfy his restless, craving spirit. Maeterlinck's own imaginative tendency towards mysticism developed more and more under the influence of Plotinus, of Ruysbroeck, and of Novalis. In the Introductions to the translations of the two last (afterwards printed as essays in *Le Trésor des Humbles*) one can see how much this tendency seems to increase under their sway; the perilous heights that would make the practical and utilitarian philosopher dizzy merely to regard, inspire Maeterlinck only with a strong desire to scale them.

An active man, keenly alive to the things of this world, Maeterlinck yet feels himself far more strongly bound to the spirit-world, and that

in no vague and far-off sense, but in the hope of helping to bring about the day of swift and immediate communion of soul with soul, when spirit will join spirit and thought will unite with thought, though never a word has been spoken, and eyes, it may be, have but once glanced into eyes. The physical presence, to a comprehending spirit, should be enough to reveal the essence of the man.

The calm and beauty of the perfect spirit, such as Emerson, Novalis, and Ruysbroeck had conceived it, seem to blend and become yet more beautiful under the exquisite touch of Maeterlinck, and just as the work of these his predecessors helped to render his own spirit calmer and more beautiful, so does he shape their conception of beauty till the perfection of the ideal is reached. If he has borrowed, how richly has he repaid in completing and perfecting the models lent!

The old mystics taught Maeterlinck where to look for the transcendental ego, but he has come nearer than any other to teaching the modern world where to find it.

If Ruysbroeck and Novalis have been Maeterlinck's guides to the loftier reaches of things spiritual, Carlyle and Emerson have led the way to the true and beautiful in common life. Maeterlinck has known how to learn from both, and to make an exquisite blend of the beauties of all.

The direct outcome of the philosophic attitude produced by these influences is, as we have seen,

Le Trésor des Humbles. The very names of the essays suggest Maeterlinck's attitude to life, both outer and inner. In "Le Silence," we see the Carlylian student, reading an even deeper meaning into man's silence than his master.

In "Le Réveil de l'Âme," and "Les Avertis," our author shows us the purpose for which the silence of man is necessary. Here too, and in "La Morale Mystique," Maeterlinck reveals the bond of union between the outer and inner spirit-world, a world ever more recognised as the material world grows older.

In "Sur les Femmes," we have the note struck later in the characters of Aglavaine and Sélysette, and still more in Ariane and Giovanna—the note of modern moral and spiritual progress, which ultimately depends more on women than on men.

The essay on Emerson, as well as those on the mystics already mentioned, gives another glimpse of some of the sources of Maeterlinck's inspiration. It is, as he himself says, the capacity for appreciating what is great and noble in others that makes man greater and finer than he was: wherever he venerates (if the object be not utterly false and unworthy—and sometimes, even if it be so), he raises himself to the height of his veneration. We must notice that it is not to the height of the object venerated, but to the height of the generous admiration called forth by some real, or fancied, qualities.

"Le Tragique Quotidien" provides a key to the theory of the "static drama," which Maeter-

linck holds up as his ideal. In reading the Maeterlinckian theory one is reminded of Hamlet's impatient "Oh, reform it altogether," in talking of the stage to the players. Here again Maeterlinck is in the van of progress.

The last four essays, with their beautiful names, have no less beautiful contents: "L'Étoile," "La Bonté Invisible," "La Vie Profonde," and "La Beauté Intérieure." One sees them as a forecast of the riper *Sagesse et Destinée*, the pregnant suggestion that the permanent soul of man exists, not as a puny, individual spirit, but, even in this world, as a part of the great world-spirit, to which every purity, every nobility, every greatness of the individual adds; so that great souls affect not only those of their own day and of after-time who consciously go to them for guidance, but the very spirit of the peasant who is ignorant of the thought-essence that ennobles him. The labourer has never heard of Plato nor of his doctrines, but he has a richer soul to-day because Plato lived. The theory of spirit is here based on the theory of matter: if matter is indestructible, how much more so is spirit; every particle, so to speak, is conserved, and the universal world-soul is the richer for its conservation.

Such was the point that Maeterlinck reached in *Le Trésor des Humbles*—the only work that may be said to bridge the gulf between the second and first periods. Even in this volume the change appears sudden and almost startling, until the contributory causes are carefully examined.

III

The second period is one of light and hope, of very evident optimism. The works which belong to it are: *Aglavaine et Sélysette, La Sagesse et la Destinée, La Vie des Abeilles, Ariane et Barbe Bleue, Sœur Béatrice, Monna Vanna, Le Temple Enseveli,* and *Joyzelle.*

The character of Aglavaine shows distinct change of attitude from that of the early dramas. The only personage resembling her to be found in the preceding pieces is Astolaine, who, in some ways, excels her. Aglavaine is the first character created by Maeterlinck who consciously shows the philosophic attitude. Maeterlinck's sometimes almost feminine personality reveals itself in this heroine of his; his own developing soul speaks through hers. It is she who first, in the dramas, lives the theories of the essays, who takes a finer, wider, nobler view of the common things of life. She breathes a soul into the *tragique quotidien* that is going on around her. Before the arrival of Aglavaine, Méléandre and Sélysette are pleasant, gentle people, whose scope is the ordinary routine of their twenty-four hours' day. Aglavaine seems to fill the house with a more vital spirit when she arrives. It is Méléandre whose soul kindles first, from the fire that Aglavaine has flashed into his. From her spirituality, he learns to read a new meaning into life, to look at all things with freshly opened eyes. He loves and understands the whole world better for his love for Aglavaine;

even little Sélysette, he says, has become finer and more beautiful and nobler in his eyes, because Aglavaine has not only interpreted her to him, but ennobled and inspired her too.

Aglavaine's spiritual reading of every-day life is that of Maeterlinck himself, in spite of the fundamental mistake which, it seems to me, he has made in her character.

This mistake is her want of insight into the actual position of affairs around her. She can read Méléandre and rejoice that she is making him happier, but she is curiously blind to the fact that she is rendering Sélysette's life miserable, unbearable. The duet was commonplace, but the trio, though it has chords of wonderful beauty, has discords that prove a vital lack of harmony. Aglavaine does not desire, like the vulgar third person of the melodrama, to win Méléandre's love away from Sélysette: she wishes the three to live in concord and affection together. But Sélysette, though of a gentle and not over-perceptive mind, observes the increasing mutual understanding between her husband and his sister-in-law, and despite the fact that both try to prove to her that they love her better for their affection for each other, she resolves to put an end to herself as the only barrier to their happiness. She parts regretfully from her old grandmother, and going up to the tower with her little sister, Yssaline, she throws herself down, injuring herself mortally as she does so. Méléandre guesses at the truth, and he and Aglavaine try to wring from the dying

Sélysette a confession of her suicide. But Sélysette, feeling that any such acknowledgment would destroy the value of her sacrifice, persists that her fall was due to accident. She dies, leaving Aglavaine and Méléandre still in sorrowful doubt.

In *Sagesse et Destinée* a sunnier attitude has been reached, which shows itself also in the other works of this period. The pain and gloom of the early pieces lie far behind: the atmosphere is serene. The writer seems now to possess the future as some only possess the past. The steady serenity with which he views the mischances of life is strengthening, as is the tranquil calm of his assurance that to the sage the event *per se* matters little, that it is the way in which he receives it, the way in which he allows it to influence him, that counts for him. One feels as if Maeterlinck had now assumed impervious armour, and bore a shield against which misfortune and mischance might batter in vain.

It is *character* upon which he insists, character, founded on steadfast truth, that shrinks from nothing, and is made stronger by faith in the power of humanity to work out its ultimate good. The spirit of man, which has not yet made great progress in the fields of consciousness, has still domains to master, still worlds to conquer.

As time goes on, the spirit of the individual comprehends more and more its relation to the larger spirit, the universal mind, and it strives increasingly to put itself in tune with that mind, banishing the discordant and inharmonious. The

upward striving to live always at the highest is bracing, like "winds austere and pure."

This idea recurs time after time in *Sagesse et Destinée* :—

> But to go as quickly as possible is not always the wisest course to take. It is often better to take directly the loftiest possible flight.[1]

> One never really does one's duty in the inner life, except by doing it always in the loftiest manner of which one's soul and one's inner truth are capable.[2]

Later, we find :—

> It is always the loftiest peak that is right.[3]

Wisdom, Maeterlinck argues, is something larger than reason ; reason is only a part of it. It may be said to be Divine reason acting upon human reason ; it has its roots in love more than in reason. The wise man can influence the destinies of all around, because of his wisdom. He knows how to receive the blows as well as the caresses of Fate, and is never taken at a loss. We receive from life, Maeterlinck tells us, what we give to it ; happiness is a positive duty in every man, for the sake of others as well as himself.

The final note sounded in *Sagesse et Destinée* is very characteristic of its author : above all, whatever your fate, do not lose courage ! Browning himself does not set the echoes ringing more bravely to this same trumpet-call.

Another very powerful factor in the development

[1] *Sagesse et Destinée*, p. 5. [2] Ibid. p. 15. [3] Ibid. p. 52.

of Maeterlinck during this period is his study of science, in the search for truth. Truth, in whatever form he finds it, is to Maeterlinck infinitely more beautiful than the most beautiful falsehood, than the most exquisite illusion. If you do not find it so, he says, it is because you are not realising the whole truth, but only some broken fragment.

Science, as a revealer of truth, therefore appeals to him, chiefly on its naturalistic side. To his scientific study we are indebted for the wonderful *Vie des Abeilles*, and the exquisite *Intelligence des Fleurs*. It is evident, from his attitude towards the intelligence of the insect-world, that the intelligence of flowers had not a place in Maeterlinck's mind when he planned and wrote *La Vie des Abeilles*.

In this book, we find the most courageous optimism, in spite of natural facts of a kind most depressing in themselves. Pope's confident declaration, "Whatever is, is right," might have been Maeterlinck's own in this volume, though the mental attitude in the saying of it would have been very different.

La Vie des Abeilles is a mingling of poetry and science. It has no pretensions to be a scientific work; it is a most sympathetic study of the life, and the meaning of the life, of the bee. The problems of the hive are stated with all the mystery that surrounds them. It is characteristic of Maeterlinck that he is not afraid of saying "I do not know"; he has enough of knowledge to risk saying "This is a mystery," and not to attempt futile

explanation. The subject, as, later, that of *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, is treated in a most intensely sympathetic manner.

In *Ariane et Barbe Bleue* and *Monna Vanna*, as later in *Marie Magdeleine*, one sees a greater grip of life, of human character and conditions, of which Maeterlinck was himself, perhaps, hardly conscious. *Ariane* is the apologia of the modern feminist movement. The captive women, among whom appear the heroines of some of the earlier plays, are timid and shrinking, and hide gladly in the darkness to which their tyrant, Barbe Bleue, has consigned them. It would be disobedience to try to escape; the rôle of a woman is to obey, however tyrannical and unreasonable the order. To these comes Ariane, strong and beautiful in soul, momentarily sharing their captivity, in order to give them liberty. Her startling doctrine of disobedience to their captor terrifies them, yet, to a certain point, they obey her, so mechanical a habit is it to obey. But when the doors stand open, and Ariane invites them to come with her, they tremble and refuse. So much accustomed are their poor souls and bodies to captivity and dependence, that they reject the undoing of their fetters. Ariane leaves them to minister to the caprices of their tyrant. Let them be! What matters liberty to such as they? They could make no noble use of it, with their poor dwarfed souls. Well might the poet call the piece *La Délivrance Inutile*.

Sœur Béatrice, Miracle en trois actes, is, like *Marie Magdeleine*, later, a reflection of the mood

of *Sagesse et Destinée*. *Sœur Béatrice* marks no new stage of development; it rather indicates a pervading tendency: it shows, under a new guise, the love of the mysterious.

Sister Beatrice, a nun, much beloved in her convent, yields to the persuasions of a passionate lover, and leaves the nunnery. The Virgin, whose statue, curiously resembling this nun, it was Beatrice's duty to deck, comes down from her pedestal and takes the place of Beatrice, so that all in the convent believe the sister is still there. But no one can understand why the statue has gone. The new Sister acquires a great reputation for sanctity and piety, and when, more than twenty years later, Beatrice herself returns to the convent, old, grey-haired, worn and ill, no one believes her story; her mind is thought to be unbalanced, and she dies surrounded by love and pity, into which no horror or censure has crept.

The tale is not a new one. Gautrei de Coinci, a Benedictine monk (1177-1236), tells such a story in his *Contes Pieux*: he, however, relates that the erring sister prayed daily to the Virgin, who took her place in the convent. In modern English literature, John Davidson's *Ballad of a Nun* tells the same tale in very picturesque fashion.

Monna Vanna betrays hitherto unrevealed qualities in Maeterlinck's genius: those of historical pageantry and sustained and impassioned rhetoric. Springing from the general motif of the play, which has caused endless discussion, and is, after all, largely a matter of taste and knowledge of the

character of the time and of the people represented here, there is a special problem that is closely connected with Maeterlinck's philosophy, into which we shall look later. The play itself is full of life and colour ; it proved to the critics that our author was not merely an admirable and artistic master of a puppet-show, as some had been inclined to deem him, but a creature of flesh and blood realities, capable of wide dramatic possibilities.

Pisa is threatened by the Florentine army under Prinzivalle, who, in answer to a message sent from the beleaguered city, responds that he will provision it that very evening, if Giovanna, the wife of the Pisan leader, Guido Colonna, comes to him for one night, clad only in her mantle. Marco, the father of Guido, brings the message, which fills Guido with fury. To his extreme surprise, Vanna is willing to go. She goes, and discovers that Prinzivalle and she had met as children, and that he had since then worshipped her memory. He tells her also that he is in danger of his life from foes in Florence. When day dawns, and Vanna is to return to Pisa, she asks Prinzivalle to accompany her there and take refuge from the enemies in his own camp. Giovanna is certain that Prinzivalle will be warmly welcomed by Guido, for having respected her while in the Florentine camp. But she is mistaken. Guido refuses to believe the real state of affairs, and spurns Vanna as a liar. Marco understands and believes her story. Guido can only believe that Giovanna has trapped Prinzivalle to the Pisan camp, and to that acceptation of her action she

finally assents, and boldly tells Guido the lie that he believes is the only possible truth. Then, in the wondering phase of change in Vanna's affection for Guido to contempt and almost hatred for him, and in her dawning love for Prinzivalle, now a prisoner of war at Pisa, Vanna demands that she alone shall have the key of his prison, and the drama ends with her enraptured words: "Le beau va commencer . . . le beau va commencer."

The problems suggested by *Monna Vanna* and others are handled in *Le Temple Enseveli*, which is, perhaps, Maeterlinck's most characteristic work. Marco's criticism of Vanna's act—

> It is just and very unjust, like everything that is done—[1]

makes the starting-point for *Le Temple Enseveli*, which gives a reasoned discussion concerning the seat of justice in the universe, the human idea of God, and the eternal mysteries surrounding us, together with an expression of the author's views on the subject of chance. He comes back to this subject again and again; for instance, in *Le Double Jardin*, "Le Temple du Hasard," and "La Mort et la Couronne"; and in *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, in "Les Dieux de la Guerre" and "L'Accident." Maeterlinck here attempts to bring Chance into the realm of universal law, by discovering by what laws it is governed, and how far mischance may be averted through foreknowledge.

The keynote of the whole is the search for truth, human and Divine.

[1] *Monna Vanna*, p. 103.

Joyzelle is another sort of parable of the efficacy of love. In *Sœur Béatrice*, the purity and strength of human passion draw down Divine love and save the passionate lover; in *Joyzelle*, the strength and purity of the human love save the beloved object, certainly a step in advance. *Joyzelle* is fanciful, and a little involved in places: it is almost too obviously based on Shakespeare's *Tempest*; but it contains a very modern aspect of an old problem. While Joyzelle has infinitely more strength of character than the charming Miranda, and Lancéor plays a fair second to Ferdinand, Maeterlinck's conception of Arielle is more sensuous and much less delicate and pleasing than Shakespeare's Ariel. As for the plots, the one is a love-tale, the other a problem.

The problem is the constancy of love through trials and temptations: the woman's love is found to withstand the uttermost in defence of the most sacred affection, the man's bends and well-nigh breaks altogether. Lancéor, son of Merlin, is only to be mated with Joyzelle if she prove steadfast. That *he* should prove steadfast is not apparently necessary, provided he keep in the main to his love for Joyzelle. The old, ruinous difference of the moral standard once more! Arielle, as a woman, tempts Lancéor, and he yields to her charms, while Joyzelle resists the wiles of Merlin. Both are intentional trials, planned by Merlin. In the end, the father unites the romantic young lovers, and goes forth to meet his fate, Vivienne.

From the production of *Ariane* onwards, there

is a difference in Maeterlinck's attitude. One feels that he is himself in the fullness of life, and that his work reflects it. It has become crisper, more vigorous, almost more tangible, if one might say so. There is a new change coming over it, not so sudden in appearance as the first great change, but one is conscious of its presence.

The first period might be said to be the spring-time of bud and leaf, delicate and tentative: the second, of fragrant blossoms, ripening, before the summer is over, into firm, mellow fruit—the fruit of the third period. In these last works of the second period we find a less ethereal and less reasoned optimism beginning to show itself, together with a more definite rejection of the commonly accepted doctrines of the orthodox Christian Church.

IV

These are also features of the third period of activity. Throughout the less brilliantly optimistic works of this period there is a suggestion of compromise with external forces. Much, Maeterlinck argues, is in man's power, but not everything: there are chances and accidents beyond him; he has, as it were, physical control of some of these forces as long as they are in his hand. But when once these are let loose, like the far-reaching shot from a machine-gun, none can say where the destruction will end. It is here that the note of caution, the note of the visibly older mind, comes in: let man not cease to experiment in his search for truth

and knowledge, but let him be prudent how he sets free in the world a force he cannot recall. He has to reckon with the mysterious and vital element in things which he has not even begun to understand. Though, to take a familiar instance, he himself makes every separate item of the lamp of daily use, he cannot say what that flame is that he produces by the mingling of the elements; he knows not what elemental forces lurk in the light he kindles. Maeterlinck has not lost courage, but his courage is now mingled with prudence.

The works belonging to the third period are: *Le Double Jardin, L'Intelligence des Fleurs, L'Oiseau Bleu,* the translation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth, Marie Magdeleine,* and *La Mort* (published in English in October 1911, and in its original French in February 1913).

Throughout this period there is a suggestion that Maeterlinck is more closely in touch than before with the ordinary daily events of common life. The aloofness of his manner is still, to a certain extent, present, a dreamy, meditative aloofness, but one feels that the life of the world has become more real to him, and consequently that he becomes a more living personality to his readers. Most especially is this the case with the exquisite drama *L'Oiseau Bleu*. In treating of children, or writing for them, Maeterlinck has that delicate, sympathetic touch to which the child-nature responds readily, as to one that understands. The child thrills to it at once, and so also do the few grown people

(several poets among them) who have not lost the fantastic and dramatic child-imagery. In French literature, Victor Hugo possessed supremely this faculty of insight into the child-mind; in England, perhaps, Stevenson and Kipling have had it most strongly amongst moderns. Kipling, alas! is losing it now, in his heavier handling of less delicate matters.

The two parallel volumes of essays, than which Maeterlinck has written nothing finer, from the point of view of clearness and elegance of style, viz., *Le Double Jardin* and *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, show some new interests and fresh developments. In "Sur la Mort d'un Petit Chien" (the first essay in *Le Double Jardin*), Maeterlinck describes almost all the vanquished plant and animal creation as sullenly hostile to us. The dog alone is faithful, loyal, devoted to man and his interests: he, happier than man, has found his god, and is willing to render him implicit obedience. This we see also in *L'Oiseau Bleu*.

One is strongly reminded, too, of the attitude of *La Vie des Abeilles*, to which "La Colère des Abeilles" is a postscript. Man stumbles, lonely, through the midst of a world formed before he came to it, and regarding him, to a certain extent, as an intruder. He considers himself as the only being in the world with intelligence, but let him look carefully. Finding it fairly well developed in the dog, he will find it in much smaller creatures as well, e.g. the ant and the bee. The bee is Maeterlinck's special protégée; all that the ant-

admirers have claimed for the ant, Maeterlinck claims for the bee.

Farther down in the scale of being than the insect-world does Maeterlinck find intelligence. A very sympathetic and erudite piece of writing is his *Intelligence des Fleurs*. The name indicates the purpose. If divinity consisted in intelligence, we might call Maeterlinck's theory of nature a sort of naturalistic pantheism. He is too scientific to be labelled a pantheist, as the word is generally understood, but in his search for universal intelligence he finds a particular intelligence (springing from the instinct of the propagation of species) in fixed, as well as in movable, forms of life.

For Maeterlinck now, nature has almost become a flower-garden. We have "L'Intelligence des Fleurs," [1] "Les Parfums," [2] "Les Sources du Printemps," [3] "Fleurs des Champs," [4] "Chrysanthèmes," [5] and "Fleurs Démodées." [6] These are all beautiful and all characteristically expressive of one side of our many-sided writer. "La Mesure des Heures" [7] might almost be classed with these. The question of the drama, a vital one with Maeterlinck, appears in "À propos du Roi Lear," [8] and "Le Drame Moderne." [9]

Two social essays are found in these volumes: "Le Suffrage Universel," in *Le Double Jardin*, and "Notre Devoir Social," in *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*. Those which principally mark Maeterlinck's stand-

[1] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs.* [2] Ibid. [3] *Le Double Jardin.*
[4] Ibid. [5] Ibid. [6] Ibid.
[7] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs.* [8] Ibid. [9] *Le Double Jardin.*

point in philosophy are: "L'Inquiétude de notre Morale," [1] "Le Pardon des Injures," [2] "L'Immortalité," [3] "De la Sincérité," [4] and "Les Rameaux d'Olivier." [5]

The attitude here described cannot be said to be a new one for Maeterlinck. It is, rather, a natural development from the former—natural, as it is natural for one's view of the world to change and to accommodate itself in turn to the eyes of twenty or of fifty. Only, one feels inclined to ask, did Maeterlinck expect the years to bring him more spiritual experience than they have done? He is still far from being of an age with his inspired old men, but should he attain that age, will he feel that his philosophy has led him as far as he hoped?

The morbidness and terror of the early times gave place to the almost violent reaction of the following period; now a gentler middle course is being steered among the deeps and shallows of world-thought; and it seems that neither are the depths so deep, nor are the possible heights quite so high, as he had once imagined.

As a practical philosophy, the philosophy of the mellower period is more workable, as we have said, more reasoned, though, perhaps, less inspired, and consequently less inspiring.

L'Oiseau Bleu sets the old echoes ringing: let man seek where he will for the talisman that is to bring understanding happiness, it is finally

[1] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs.* [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid.
[4] *Le Double Jardin.* [5] Ibid.

at home that he finds it—"Look in thy heart and write." It is internal, not external, and one comes to the end of the journey of exploration both the poorer and the richer for it; really the richer, if one only knew how to accept the law of the universe, the "Know thyself," that rings unchanging through the æons of time. *L'Oiseau Bleu* is, in its way, a serious contribution to practical philosophy as well as to drama.

Two children, a boy and a girl, sent by a Christmas fairy, set out to seek for a blue bird, necessary for the health of the fairy's little daughter, who is ill. The boy, Tyltyl, is given a diamond, which, on being turned, reveals the soul of things, a truly Maeterlinckian conception. Light guides the little seekers, and the dog —alone, as we saw, among all the lower creation sincerely devoted to man—accompanies them. They seek in the kingdom of the Past and the Future, they peer into the secret recesses of the Empire of Night, they search the forest and the graveyard, and many a time they fancy they have found the wonderful bird, but they are mistaken. All the other animals, except the dog, revolt against the tyranny of man; the wily cat, while pretending to be the friend of Mytyl, incites the rest; the plant creation joins the animals, but the two little human beings, with the aid of Light and the diamond, escape from their toils. Other trials await them: at one time they nearly succumb to earthly desires, but they struggle on. The graveyard scene, in which the children discover that "there are no

dead," is beautiful and poetic in conception and in carrying out.

At last they are home again, and their parents imagine they are wandering in their minds when they speak of their adventures. Tyltyl discovers that his bird which is hanging in its cage is blue, and bestows it on his neighbour's little sick girl, who has longed for it for some time. The neighbour is curiously like the fairy Bérylune, and her name is Berlingot. Her child recovers when the bird is given to her, but when Tyltyl is showing her how to feed it, it escapes, and the little boy makes an appeal to any one among the audience who should find it, to restore it, as it is necessary for his family's happiness later. The piece is an exquisite mingling of poetry and philosophy. The new act which was added, representing the visit of the children to the palace of the Luxuries and the Happinesses is, artistically, a mistake. There Maeterlinck belies his own theory of beauty, and sacrifices beauty of form to moral teaching.

The translation of *Macbeth*, which appeared in print in 1910, is an excellent piece of work: that of a poet who keenly appreciates the quality of the material he is handling; though there are some pieces that one might have wished otherwise. It would be interesting to see what Maeterlinck would make of *Hamlet*, that prince of dramas, or *King Lear*, which he estimates even more highly.

Marie Magdeleine has more of the mystic touch than anything else written during this period. It has some extremely dramatic situations and some

pieces of great beauty, but it is unconvincing. How, in the face of his former declarations, does Maeterlinck mean the Christ-figure to be taken? If it is as Marie Magdeleine takes him, then we are entering again upon a fresh Maeterlinckian period with an entirely new basis. This idea recurs perpetually in reading and re-reading the drama, although each time one assures oneself, from the other works, that such is not the case. The play belongs obviously to the period after *Sagesse et Destinée*, and before *Monna Vanna*.

Marie Magdeleine, as the name indicates, deals with the biblical story of Christ's influence over Mary Magdalene. She is represented as a proud and fascinating beauty, who has charmed many lovers, but herself only loved Verus, the Roman military tribune. While she, along with other guests, is at the house of Annœus Silanus, they all hear a voice that is speaking in an adjacent garden. Marie Magdeleine, as if fascinated, draws nearer and nearer to it, until she is driven off by the cries of those who have recognised the Magdalen. But the spell does not leave her; she is deeply impressed by the appearance of Lazarus, raised from the dead, and the mysterious being who can speak as that voice spoke, and can raise the dead to life, seems to draw her to him irresistibly. She is coarsely misunderstood by Verus, and finally gives away her riches and joins the band of the Nazarene. When the time of the trial and crucifixion of Christ comes, she is the most eager amongst the mixed band of followers

to save him. This she hopes to do by means of Verus, the Roman tribune. But he, jealous of her affection for any but himself, sets base conditions before her as the price of Christ's life. She, in an agony of hesitation, beseeches him to deal more honourably with her, but he refuses. She must accede to the carrying out of the death-sentence passed on Jesus of Nazareth rather than lose her honour, which she feels is a part of this same Jesus's gift to her. Verus declares to the frightened rabble who were followers of Jesus, that Mary Magdalene has betrayed and destroyed him and all of them with him, and they, who would save themselves at any price, raise a clamour of indignation against her. The drama ends with the sound of the words: "Crucify him!" that rises from the street to the upper room.

It is still more puzzling to re-read *Marie Magdeleine* after reading its successor *La Mort*, the outcome of Maeterlinck's former philosophy. There the ideas are totally opposed to the general notion pervading *Marie Magdeleine*, which it would be contrary to the whole spirit of Maeterlinck's work to take as a separate unit, or as a piece written purely for the sake of the picturesque and dramatic situation. The conclusion of the play, too, lacks finish. The last scene is striking, but unsatisfying. One feels one has a right to demand of the author some indication of the after-effect on these personages of the great dramatic moment in which the play culminates. Where the leading thought of the drama is one of spiritual influence, it seems

not unfair to ask for some suggestion of how far that influence vitally affected the chief characters concerned.

La Mort is a sequel to the essay on immortality in *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, or rather a re-writing and expanding of it, combined with the discussion of an interesting problem : the absolute importance, physically and mentally, of the change we know as death, and the justification one has for avoiding the same, at any cost. This introduces the question of how far it is justifiable for medical science to keep patients alive only to suffer in some form, and be a burden to themselves and others. Maeterlinck would bestow on doctors the right to give the *coup de grâce* to suffering incurables, on the ground that death itself is not a terrible event, and that the view of life and death is hopelessly mistaken that prefers any form of our known life, however helpless and painful, to that sleep of death in which "dreams may come." This volume is, consciously or unconsciously, an embroidering of the theme of the most famous soliloquy in *Hamlet*. Maeterlinck is just saying to his readers less dramatically :—

> . . . who would fardels bear,
> To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
> But that the dread of something after death,
> The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
> No traveller returns, puzzles the will
> And makes us rather bear those ills we have
> Than fly to others that we know not of?
> . . . . . .
> . . . there's the respect
> That makes calamity of so long life. . . .

Only Shakespeare makes no mention of the doctor: the action he suggests is taken by the world-weary on himself:—

> . . . he himself might his quietus make
> With a bare bodkin. . . .

One finds it difficult to judge this third period of Maeterlinck, as we have called it, without knowing something of what is still to come from his pen. One cannot yet venture to say whether the works just mentioned are a rounding off of the third period, or the beginning of a fourth, which will show a further change in point of view or style of treatment. *La Mort* suggests a certain mellowness and persistency of opinion which looks as if it would not readily be altered. Maeterlinck has deliberately taken up the threads of the "Immortalité" essay, and so shows that it is along that line of thought that any new work is likely to proceed. It is not very satisfying as the result of riper thought, in this, that in spite of its tone of optimistic assurance, it is vague, and leaves one with the feeling that the author is going to rest content with speculative vagueness.

He is here hardly convincing enough for his suggestions to be accepted as solutions of the age-old problems. Nor does he mean them to be so; one chapter of the translation is boldly headed "No Answer Necessary." One would be tempted to ask, if it were not for the really optimistic inspiration of the book, what is its *raison*

d'être? There is a rather interesting statement and some discussion of theosophical and spiritualistic doctrines, and the results of experiments of the Psychical Research Society. But Maeterlinck brings nothing new out of these. His conclusions are carefully thought out, but at the end he confesses :—

> I have added nothing to all that was already known. I have simply tried to separate what may be true from what certainly is *not*.[1]

The book ends courageously and cheerfully, in the spirit of Browning's Epilogue to "Asolando," that teaches man when "baffled, to fight better." It is the spirit rather than the argument that is helpful to the baffled and faint-hearted.

From the point of view of this volume, *Marie Magdeleine* must be regarded purely as an experiment. Both of these last works stamp Maeterlinck more than ever as *un esprit qui se laisse aller au mystère*.

[1] *La Mort*, p. 270.

CHAPTER III

ESSENTIAL AND UNDERLYING UNITY IN MAETERLINCK'S WORK

Indivisibility of human being.
Maeterlinck's work really continuous.
Mystery, terror, death.
Interaction and evolution of dramas and essays.
Maeterlinck's notions of drama in *Trésor des Humbles*.
Outcome, *Aglavaine et Sélysette*.
Tendency to mystical.
Sagesse et Destinée, *Monna Vanna*, *Temple Enseveli*.
Need of concrete.
Dominant notes :—
Search for truth.
Love of beauty and justice.
Faculty of wonder and admiration.

THERE is too great a tendency in these times, in considering a man and his work, to divide him into his different qualities and functions, physical, moral, intellectual, spiritual, and in the zeal for specialising and labelling, to forget that man is a unity. The fault lies partly in modern education ; separate " subjects " are taught, and few instructors consider it their duty to furnish the youthful mind with the connections necessary for making the various subjects into a chain capable of standing some strain, instead of being, as they frequently are, disconnected links, soon to be cast

aside as useless. In thought, too, is found this over-analytical tendency. We talk glibly about the moral part of man and the spiritual, and oppose the ethical to the intellectual faculty. Such talk is purely superficial, but it passes current among the discursive.

In considering the work, literary or philosophical, of a writer, it is necessary to bear in mind the fact that man is one and indivisible; that it is difficult even to decide with absolute exactness that which pertains to body and to soul, so close and frequent is their interaction.

Some such relation exists between the individual and the mass. "No man liveth unto himself and no man dieth unto himself." This idea of oneness throughout the personality and works of an individual, and the fact that the background against which that individual stands out is a necessary part of the picture, must be borne in mind, in judging of any personality, especially of one such as Maeterlinck. The divisions we make are purely artificial, and frequently prevent our understanding the whole. The essential unity of Maeterlinck's work through different phases of his development is in itself an extremely interesting study. To understand it thoroughly, we must examine the background: we must remember that we are the heirs of all the ages, and that every age has left its stamp upon our making. A comprehension of the dynamic theory of the human soul [1]—a theory derived from

[1] Vide Preface to *Annabella*, p. xi.

some unknown mystic and firmly held by Maeterlinck—helps us to understand him better. The cumulative force of philosophy and science, literature and art, is, since the world began, a factor in the making of the present generation, but the faculty to understand the very elements of which we are composed must be aroused in us from its dormant state. It was the mysticism of the past and present that awoke in Maeterlinck, while, at the same time, the slumbering poetic fire was kindled within him. The background is made, the way is prepared for every man; the materials that go to form the genius have been long a-making, and it very often happens that the genius is simply he who has the power to express the thoughts and desires of his age in such language that his contemporaries at once acclaim his message as true, because it is their own inner truth for which he has found more exquisite expression. The prophet-genius, the seer, has more than this: he trenches on the riches of the future.

What Maeterlinck says in speaking of Shakespeare and Racine is especially true of himself, and of his period, as it is, more or less, of all periods:—

> It is not enough for one great isolated soul to bestir itself here and there, in space or time. It will do little if it has no help. It is the flower of multitudes. . . .[1]

Of Maeterlinck it is pre-eminently true that he is the flower of multitudes: that one must study

[1] *Le Trésor des Humbles*, pp. 39, 40.

carefully all that has tended to his florescence. He is a versatile genius, the study of whom, as dramatist, poet, philosopher, or naturalist, well repays the student; but nothing is more misleading than to imagine that one has seized the whole man in any one of these. To understand Maeterlinck as a philosopher one must read his dramas; to appreciate him as a poet the essays are indispensable. Each part of his work is an evolution from the preceding, though the genre be different.

The picking out of scattered phrases and isolated ideas from essays and plays, and setting them down without context or explanation, is essentially unfair as a method of criticism, especially in the case of such a writer as Maeterlinck. "Criticism" (if one may so misapply the word) of this type is puerile, and quite unworthy of a writer of repute; all the more surprising is it to find such a method, and so much flippancy, used by a critic of the standing of M. Émile Faguet, in his "Causerie Théâtrale," in *Les Annales*, of March 5, 1911.

It is only by watching carefully the interconnection of the whole and its parts that one can arrive at a fair, clear, logical view of a writer's total philosophy of life. If a writer, calling himself a philosopher, is so precocious that the views he formed in early years will satisfy him all through life, then one may have the right, so far, to typify him at any time from incidental extracts of any date, or consider one book an illustration of the whole. But if he have the

vital forces of growth and development keenly present in him, as Maeterlinck undoubtedly has, the injustice of judging him at fifty by what he wrote at twenty is evident, or still more, of judging him by fragmentary portions culled from various books and placed together so as to bring out their superficial opposition rather than their underlying continuity of thought. It is only a very petty critic who places surface consistency before real growth.

The mystery of the world draws Maeterlinck like a magnet. In the early stages, the mysterious for him is akin to the terrible, is sometimes one with it. When he has passed through this phase of development, during which the illusion of Death shuts out almost everything but the narrow road of the Past, he struggles to read the mystery more clearly, and to separate the unknown from the unknowable. The gradual and progressive conquest of the unknown, until, at last, man possesses it wholly, is man's mission in the world, and each fresh victory is not for the victor alone, but for the race.

This attitude of mind one can trace through all Maeterlinck's works, every one of which seems to have some new conquest to report. The early, glowing view of life found vent only in pain-oppressed poetry and dramas heavy with mischance. "Alas!" they seem to say to us, "sorrow and death are in all the things of life. Shun them we cannot: they are ever in the path. But let us at least not yield without a struggle, for the

sake of our humanity. Then, when yield we must, let us do so as sweetly and nobly as possible. Let us suffer and die with grace on our lips, if it be not in our heart." At this early stage the approach towards the "inconscient" was for Maeterlinck the approach to night and terror. But let us advance boldly towards this gloom, the light of courage in our hands, and animated by the desire for truth, and the night becomes beautiful in its glowing brilliance and ere long turns to day. The young tend to regard Death with tragic horror, as the dread end of things known and warm and living. The change of this very conception is one of the things that best marks Maeterlinck's development in the direction of the unknown and mysterious element. In *Sagesse et Destinée* Death has already become merely an incident in life, and not the incident of supreme importance, not the incident whose shadow cuts off all others from sight.

In *La Princesse Maleine* the view of death is somewhat similar to that held by the old Elizabethans: the whole drama is evidently Shakespeare-inspired. In *Pelléas et Mélisande* and *Alladine et Palomides* the conception is more or less the same. But in *L'Intruse, Les Sept Princesses, Intérieur, La Mort de Tintagiles,* Maeterlinck's natural mysticism gives rise to a more mysterious interpretation, and in the first and last of these Death becomes a spiritual personality, whose very presence one feels, and feels with a shudder.

Again, in *L'Intruse, Les Aveugles, Les Sept Princesses,* and *Intérieur* we see Maeterlinck's mystic tendencies working out in the direction of the " static theatre," which he sought to establish, and expects to be the theatre of the future. In these pieces, the violent action which is due to the Elizabethan influence, plus the early Maeterlinckian conception, of which we have just spoken, gives place to singular paucity of act, amply atoned for (except, perhaps, in *Les Sept Princesses*) by fullness of feeling and thought, and singularly skilful and artistic representation. This drama of soul-status took the public unawares, and it was not till Maeterlinck had explained his views in *Le Trésor des Humbles* that he was understood.

By the time that the dramatist had reached this stage, he had discovered that the philosopher cannot make clear to the public his views by means of the drama only, although the artist in him would, perhaps, have wished it. He had something to say, and he meant that the world should understand it. He had spoken in parables that had not been comprehended ; his love of beauty had chosen the dramatic form. But his love of truth and his hatred of error and misunderstanding put into his hands the weapon of his exquisite prose. *Le Trésor des Humbles* attempts to formulate for his readers Maeterlinck's notions of drama, of beauty, of truth, of silence, of the great things that appeal to him, and in the doing it clarifies the ideas, and enlarges and develops them.

The philosophic expression of his ideas rouses

him to give a fresh concrete example of the working out of them: hence we have *Aglavaine et Sélysette*. The character of Aglavaine and the sacrifice of Sélysette carry him a step farther, and produce the philosophic reflections of *Sagesse et Destinée*. So the chain goes on: *Monna Vanna* leads to *Le Temple Enseveli*, and *Joyzelle* springs from it. Each dramatic creation produces a further reasoning-out of his attitude to life; and each clearer explanation suggests new dramatic possibilities. In the alternating production of his works Maeterlinck seems to hover between the exercise of the philosopher: the ideal imagination, and the artistic: the concrete. The curious need that he has of a concrete illustration of his theories shows that, philosopher as he is at heart and primarily, he has a very great deal of the artist in his composition, so much, indeed, that some have judged him more artist than philosopher.

In his very interesting and appreciative critique on Maeterlinck's philosophy, in the *Hibbert Journal*[1] Professor Dewey speaks of Maeterlinck as "a writer who is primarily an artist and secondarily a philosopher." That judgment seems hardly to appreciate Maeterlinck's standpoint, unless we take it that the art is absolutely unconscious. He is a philosopher from the beginning, in his poems, his dramas, and his essays; he seeks after the form that will make himself most explicable to his readers, not for the sake of the form but because he has something to say. Although the dramas

[1] Vol. ix. p. 766, No. 4, July 1911.

are most exquisitely constructed in the most rhythmical and musical of French prose, it is the philosophic poet that speaks throughout; the conscious artist is everywhere subordinate to the philosopher, one might almost say whether he willed it or not.

As Maeterlinck's own ethical standard grew clearer and more definite before his eyes, so did the purpose of his plays gain in luminousness and definiteness of outline, and his characters preached in living act, if not in word, what the essays stated in precept. The intense spirituality of the dramas, both in word and deed, showed that the doctrine of the essays was no mere empty idealism, but could be embodied in character.

Nowhere in prose or poetry, except, perhaps, in the *Serres Chaudes*, do we find Maeterlinck polishing a phrase at the expense of the thought it contains. The thought flows freely, whether it be in the magnificently simple, fluid prose of the essays or the rhythmic cadence of the dramatic pieces. All his works are jointly sources from which to draw his philosophy; that the stream to which they contribute takes a wide sweep as it broadens and deepens, and at times seems to leave some of them far behind, does not alter the fact that they are necessary tributary streamlets, without which the whole were poorer.

On what points, then, do we base our conception of Maeterlinck's real unity in his works, in spite of superficial difference? First (and briefly—we

shall deal with these points later in detail), on the search for Truth, wherever and under whatever disguise he may find it. He is eager to recognise and accept it when found, even though it should differ widely from his conjectures. He has the scientific readiness to alter his hypotheses whenever he finds they will not suit the truth. He refuses to cling to an illusion, however beautiful. He is content with no one form of expression, with no one form of thought. He seeks among the Stoics, the Mystics, old and new, the bygone drama, the imaginative and metaphysical poets, the philosophers of all ages. He uses the form he thinks most suitable to express the truth he seeks to make known, to send it home, for the truth matters above and beyond everything.

The following words from *L'Intruse* are very characteristic :—

THE UNCLE: But there is no truth!
THE GRANDFATHER: Then I do not know what there is![1]

We might here notice how often the words "*Je ne sais pas*," "*Je n'en sais rien*" are on the lips of Maeterlinck's characters. It is better frankly to confess ignorance than to pretend knowledge, is his theory; away with sham and illusion!

No less than Truth, do we find him searching for Beauty—with the suggestion at times that these two may be synonymous. He is, perhaps, the most passionate lover of beauty amongst our

[1] *Théâtre*, vol. i. p. 234.

modern writers, whether it is a question of external or internal beauty. Much of his theory of the soul is founded on his ideal of beauty. In the fine essay in *Le Trésor des Humbles*, called "La Beauté Intérieure," we find :—

> There is nothing in the world more desirous of beauty, nothing in the world that is more willing to grow beautiful, than a soul. There is nothing in the world that rises more naturally or more swiftly becomes great and noble, nothing that more readily responds to pure and lofty commands. There is nothing in the world that submits with more docility to the sway of a thought elevated above other thoughts. Thus it is that very few souls on earth resist the dominion of a soul that allows itself to grow beautiful.
>
> It might truly be said that beauty is the only food of our soul ; it seeks it everywhere, and even in the lowest life it does not die of hunger. For there is no beauty that passes totally unperceived.[1]

The third of the sacred trio Maeterlinck also seeks, the third that, united with the others, makes an unbreakable threefold cord : the kingly quality of Justice. Justice human and Divine he seeks ; but where to find it? He tries, with the aid of science, to discover it in Nature ; questionings on this subject abound, particularly in *La Vie des Abeilles* and *Le Temple Enseveli* ; but one can trace the search in all its keenness throughout *Serres Chaudes*, *Maleine*, *La Mort de Tintagiles*, and none can say how much of human blood and tears has been spent in the apparently fruitless search. It is only in *Le Temple Enseveli* that Maeterlinck reaches anything approaching a satis-

[1] *Le Trésor des Humbles*, pp. 251–2.

factory solution to the problem, and even then the answer is tentative.

Another dominant note in his work is his constant feeling of wonder and admiration. He is as far removed as a child from the blasé Horatian *nil admirari*. But his wonder and admiration are not those of the child. The child's wonder is because he does not know; Maeterlinck's wonder and admiration increase as he does know. As the marvels of science become clearer to him, as the intricacies of the human brain and all its capabilities unfold, the sense of wondering admiration grows, and with it the eternal desire to know what lies behind it all, what is the *raison d'être* of the universe, of which man forms so small a part—the passionate longing to pluck the heart out of the mystery. He comes nearer to it in *La Mort* than in *Serres Chaudes*.

Are we going to owe the revelation of the new era to him? Is it going to be connected with the tenets of Theosophy? In more than one place, in the search after the spiritual, key to the universe, Maeterlinck appears to border on theosophical doctrines. Or it may be that he has faith in somewhat similar results, attained with, so to speak, less mental mechanism. That the future which will give us (if anything will give us) the key to the mystery, bringing the "inconscient" more and more to the state of the "conscient"—that the future will be an epoch of spiritual discovery and revelation, Maeterlinck holds little doubt.

In "Le Réveil de l'Âme" he writes:—

A time will perhaps come, and many things suggest that it is approaching—a time will perhaps come in which our souls will perceive without the mediation of our senses. There is no doubt that the domain of the soul is every day extending still farther. It is much nearer our visible being and takes a much greater part in all our actions than was the case two or three centuries ago. It would seem as if we were approaching a spiritual epoch.[1]

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[1] *Le Trésor des Humbles*, p. 29.

CHAPTER IV

MAETERLINCK'S PHILOSOPHY

GENERAL ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

Maeterlinck ethical, even in dramas.
Spiritual advance in women.
Dramatic poet and philosopher.
Position of philosophy.
Modern idea of universe and of individual.
Spiritual forces in humanity.
Moral and intellectual.
Act *versus* thought.
Soul's love of beauty.
Responsibility.
Duty of happiness.
Maeterlinck's philosophy opposed to materialistic.
Sage.
Grief and joy.
Mingling of pessimism and optimism.
Faith in inherent qualities of man.
Human intelligence. Curiosity. "Morale." "Conscience." "Sagesse." "Raison."

MAETERLINCK'S purpose, in all his work, is ethical, sometimes consciously, sometimes only subconsciously: the philosopher in him will out, even through the artist. He was born to teach. One might say of him what Robert Louis Stevenson said of himself: that he might almost rise from his grave to preach, so much was the tendency in his very blood.

It is not only in Maeterlinck's philosophical

essays that he sends forth his message: it sounds out in his other prose work and in the dramas too. In the steady constancy to the ideal, to the best and noblest in oneself (whatever that may be for each individual: devotion to eternal truth, or love, or lofty altruism, such as we find in the finest characters in his dramas), we see something of Maeterlinck's ethical purpose.

The consciousness of the necessity for self-development before one can assist in the development of surrounding humanity is a note strongly struck. It is in the women, rather than in the men, that one finds spiritual advance. Astolaine is the first to show soul-development; Aglavaine, the first to recognise that she has a soul with a right to its own existence. Ariane carries on the lighted torch to Giovanna, from whom Joyzelle bears it aloft in both hands, to kindle in Marie Magdeleine the soul which has made her almost worthy beatification in the Roman Catholic Church.

The shadowy women of the earlier plays are to Ariane what the undeveloped woman of former days is to the awakened woman of to-day. The poor, prisoned captives look with terror upon Ariane's noble assertion of individuality and desire for freedom. They are far from appreciating her stirring words—

To begin with, we must disobey: that is the first duty when the command given contains a threat instead of an explanation,[1]

[1] *Théâtre*, vol. iii. p. 137.

and, terrified, they shrink back into the shadows of captivity. In different ways, Astolaine, Aglavaine, Ariane, Vanna, Joyzelle, all embody the Maeterlinckian assertion, put into the mouth of Ygraine: "To-day it is the woman's turn." The healthy respect which Maeterlinck has for the intellectual, as well as spiritual, qualities of women stamp him as a modern, and a modern of the progressive type, not a decadent.

The spirit of insight and keen desire for truth is found, too, in Maeterlinck's old men (never in his young men); Marco, Arkel, Merlin, the grandfather in *L'Intruse*, are types of the prophet-like insight of the seer, as Maeterlinck conceives him. These join hands with the women, the subtle woman-instinct springing to meet that of the old men, matured and ripened with years of experience. One finds such an understanding between Vanna and Marco, a glimmer of it, in the end, between Joyzelle and Merlin, and a shadow of it between Arkel and Mélisande.

According to Maeterlinck, the dramatic poet must also be a philosopher in order to fulfil his rôle: his work will be incomplete if he have not a reasoned philosophy of the realities of life and of the unknown beyond. Any poet must have a reasoned conception of these, but the duty of the dramatic poet is to do more than to generalise on such subjects: he must show how the unknown forces act on the known.[1] In brief, he is not a great poet unless he is also a philosopher. Maeter-

[1] *Vide* Preface to *Princesse Maleine*, xi, xii.

linck has, in the Preface to the 1908 edition of Vol. I of his *Théâtre*, indicated such a position in the world of thought as he may be said to fill himself. He sets up a high standard for the dramatic poet, a standard of which, unfortunately, many of our would-be dramatists of to-day fall very far short. The Preface is, in essence, an explanation of his intentions and methods in drama; he has certainly succeeded in showing how much he is at heart a philosopher as well as a poet, and how high are his ideals for both.

Elsewhere he speaks of how greatly philosophy has spread in this age; it has become general, rather than particular, property. The old philosophic ideal was for the individual, the modern ideal is for the race. Philosophy has stepped down from the pedestal on which she sat enthroned, with her chosen few beside her, and now she has entered into the life-struggle side by side with man, his intimate guide, helper, and consoler. She is a stimulating force in life, in the life of every day, a force disseminating her influence in all ranks, holding an ideal possible for all mankind. It is necessary, Maeterlinck argues, that mankind as a whole should work together towards this ideal, in order that the world should fulfil its mission; it cannot be elevated by its great men alone.

The geniuses among men have guided the human soul dynamically nearer the great ideals, and yet, in the development of mankind as a whole, it is the idea of the species, and not that of the individual, that counts for progress. One genius, or

two, or even a dozen, do not constitute the progress of a race. The philosophers could not, even with their noble ideals, have guided man, unaided, through the shoals and shallows of a strenuous existence, though they held a beacon light to show him where the shore lay, towards which he was struggling. The actual physical struggle with opposing natural forces had to take place before man had wrestled into such a position that he was capable of seeing and benefiting from the light held out to him.

What is necessary, then, in order to raise the mass to the level of the outstanding thinkers, is to teach it to think, to continue the spread of philosophy more and more. Modern tendencies are, and should be still more than they are, in the direction of socialism (the term being used philosophically and not politically), as opposed to individualism, each unit only seeking development and improvement in order to contribute more nobly to the whole. It is the spiritual evolution to which Tennyson points :—

> And the individual withers, and the world is more and more.

We shall see later the same idea pressed farther home in the essays on Immortality and Death.

What Maeterlinck seeks, in his capacity as poet and philosopher, is to find the spiritual forces at work in humanity, those forces that inspire the species, and drive it on towards the goal, and the still more elusive force that seems at times to bring

an individual into direct contact with the Divine, with the great Power of the universe.

It is the spiritual force that has to be reckoned with finally, when the world comes to count its progress through the ages. It is that, therefore, in man, to which the philosopher directs his attention; the vital, age-long essence, man's goodwill: the force in him that itself strives upward and causes the desire to strive, throughout his whole being; that spirit that seeks a similar force in other men and recognises men of good or evil will, without the need of words. It is that force in man that alone is vital, that alone can stand the strain of baffled hope, the cold shock of disappointment at the persistence of the unrevealed, illogical, and inconsistent in the world; it is that force alone that can withstand the apparent triumph of fatality, because it alone has the power to strive against it, for it is *will*.

It seeks a corresponding will in others, and, having found it, establishes that mysterious bond of spiritual sympathy which links age with age, and acts as a guiding and uplifting force for all time; it strides beyond contemporary relations. Those who have not entered this spiritual bond of the ages, this bond that links all humanity together in the struggle towards the Ultimate Good, have never realised the *raison d'être* of man, have been miserably content with a lower existence which has never reached the dignity of Life.

In directing attention to the spiritual in man as the most important force, Maeterlinck indicates that

it is the moral rather than the intellectual that he means. The intellect is a noble factor in human experience: but without the goodwill it too is perishable: the monuments that it leaves are not such as appeal profoundly to humanity as a whole, in its striving after the Ultimate Good, for it is only thus that humanity realises itself. Its whole struggle is towards an ethical rather than a purely intellectual ideal.

In expressing this view, Maeterlinck is not depreciating the intellectual, far from it. He is merely relegating it to a step lower than the moral, with regard to the ultimate aim of humanity, not with regard to the means. He insists strongly upon the tremendous force that intellect has been in raising mankind to its present level. Every inch of ground that man has conquered from the vast territory of the unknown for the growing domain of the known has helped towards definite progress. It is, in the main, intellect that has acquired the new ground for morality. Intellect supplied the power of thought, that discovered little by little the extent of the unknown ground, and morality supplied the will-power to conquer and retain it. The relation in which Maeterlinck places them is this: the intellect is a concourse of thoughts, each a separate intellectual factor; these, united, end in action, which is moral.

To act, he writes, is not to think any longer with the brain alone, it is to make the whole being think. To act is to close in dream and to open in reality the most profound sources of thought.[1]

[1] *Sagesse et Destinée*, p. 245.

This naturally introduces the question: Is *all* action more moral than the thought that accompanies and leads up to it? Or is it only good actions? What is the moral relation between an evil action and the thoughts that caused it?

Maeterlinck does not satisfy us on these points, nay, rather he tends to confuse his first statement by an apparently different tack. Elsewhere he tells us (as others, above all, Stevenson, have told us) that effort is a finer thing than attainment, that the pursuit of an object is nobler than the gaining of it, making no distinction as to the parts played by thought and action.

Again, in his mystic interpretation of the soul of man, in speaking of Othello, he asserts that the soul of man has an existence apart from his acts, and need not descend to the level of these, that, in fact, it can live its life, so to speak, so entirely apart from the actions of the body allied to it, that the soul of an Othello may be purer and finer after the man Othello has given way to his jealous passion and murdered Desdemona. How are we to reconcile such (apparently) opposite theories? Is not the initial error that of attempting to compare morally two incomparables, that which is the immediate material result of intellect and emotion, and that which is purely spiritual?

Can we honestly extract more truth from the first statement than the truism that good actions require more effort (generally speaking, physical) than the thoughts that lead to them, and are likely

to produce further good results (morally) in the doer and, from example, in the spectator, while, if we substitute evil for good, the same is true for evil acts?

From the second, can we learn anything more than that the progressive forces of endeavour produce an infinitely greater moral result (in him who strives) than does the momentary success of reaching the goal, which, indeed, does not make for progress, but rather stays the striver?

If we read the first and second positions thus, we find them not irreconcilable.

The third tends to make man once more an unblended aggregate of parts, each of which can function separately. The tendency, as we have seen before, to regard man otherwise than as a unity is not a forward, but rather a backward step. George Meredith, among moderns, has fought strongly against this idea, and preached the unity of human nature. Maeterlinck is also, *au fond*, a believer in this doctrine, his basis being a spiritual one.

What he would fain seek to do, here, as elsewhere, is to discover and develop the highest in man.

In *Le Pardon des Injures* his characteristic note sounds out :—

> Above all, as the years pass over our heads, let us keep ourselves from the *low* lessons of experience.[1]

The essay ends with a splendid passage, giving again the keynote of his philosophy: that it is

[1] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, p. 234.

always the highest interpretation we can give ourselves of the daily facts of life that is the true one, and this interpretation should raise its level in proportion to the sum of our experiences. According as our sense of life grows by means of its roots in the ground, it must mount into light in its flower and fruit. . . . If we had the strength and courage to wrench the secret from life, we should find it to be that, in everything, the highest interpretation is always the truest.

Towards these lofty pinnacles Maeterlinck's philosophy always points: man is struggling perpetually towards the highest, because in the highest is the only possible realisation of himself. But it is by no external agency that this striving is imposed upon him; the tendency is there, inherent. The human soul can only live in beauty and truth and justice. We have already noticed the inalienable relation between the soul and beauty, in "La Beauté Intérieure." In "Le Silence," in speaking of those who have suffered, Maeterlinck writes:—

> They alone know, it may be, on what deep soundless waters floats the frail bark of daily life; they have drawn nearer to God, and the steps that they have taken in the direction of light are steps never taken in vain: for the soul is a thing that perchance may not mount, but that *can never descend.*[1]

The passage is beautiful, almost perfect in its faith in the ultimate good, but, looked at closely, can we say it is true? Is it not the case that, in

[1] *Le Trésor des Humbles*, p. 18.

the sordid tragedies that daily surround even the philosopher, the human soul, born into the world with only a tiny spark of that vital flame that should be the heritage of all the human race, sinks by degrees beneath the weight of adverse circumstances, and in the end lies a heap of ashes, the vital spark crushed out, it would seem, for ever? We may believe in its ultimate vitality, that, setting here in gloom, it may rise elsewhere in light; but are not the evidences of human life too much against the conclusion that it "can never descend"?

Maeterlinck himself, however, does not always keep to the same high level in his definition of the soul and its functions. At one time, carried away by the immense possibilities of a beautiful soul, he forgets that human characteristics still cling, as it were, like the physical body, around this spiritual essence. At other times, the variableness that may exist even in the soul creeps in and helps to spoil the beautiful theory. For instance, in *Sagesse et Destinée* he tells us:—

> . . . The human soul, in spite of eyes that turn away or close too voluntarily, is nobler than most men would have it for their peace of mind, and it easily sees, as in a vision, what is higher than the vain moment for which its interest is sought.[1]

How does this and the (elsewhere stated) preference for truth rather than illusion compare with such a passage as the following, where Maeter-

[1] *Sagesse et Destinée*, p. 261.

linck, after speaking of the philosophic souls that accept a blow calmly, says :—

> Do not let us believe that they console themselves thus by the aid of empty words, and that all these sayings are poor attempts to conceal a wound all the more grievous that they would seek to hide it. First, it is better to console oneself by the help of empty words than not to console oneself at all. And then, if one must admit that all that is only illusion, it is just to admit, at the same time, that illusion is the only thing that a soul can possess, and in the name of what other illusion should we arrogate to ourselves the right of disdaining one illusion? [1]

Is this not contradictory, both of the attitude that any truth is preferable to illusion, and of the soul's innate desire for truth and justice as well as beauty?

Again, in *Le Trésor des Humbles* (in the passage to which reference has already been made, in connection with the view taken regarding Othello and Desdemona), we find :—

> Our soul does not judge as we do: it is a capricious and hidden thing. It may be stirred up by a breath and be unconscious of a tempest.[2]

If it be just to apply the term "capricious" to a soul, has the soul any right to the beautiful destiny Maeterlinck assigns to it?

As those pieces cited appear in the early work, at times it would seem fairer to judge that Maeterlinck's idea of the soul had developed and beautified itself with the years; although it is in *Sagesse*

[1] *Sagesse et Destinée*, p. 102.
[2] *Le Trésor des Humbles*: "Novalis," p. 150.

et Destinée itself that the most exquisite expressions of its destiny are given. *Le Temple Enseveli* and the two last volumes of essays, however, carry on the tradition of beauty and stability. It appears that it is, then, rather the idea of beauty and steadfastness and progress in the human soul that is for Maeterlinck the permanent one.

Curiously enough, in places, Maeterlinck separates the soul and its functions somewhat from the body, losing sight of the unity of man in the apotheosis of the spiritual essence in him. The Othello passage just mentioned is one example of this tendency. As long as the body is in this world the soul *must* function along with it, and (unless it be a case of mental aberration) accept responsibility for the actions of the body. Othello has not a pure and beautiful soul while he is mad with jealousy and is murdering Desdemona. The most we can say for him is that his soul *may be*, at its best, capable of unearthly beauty, but it *is* also capable of fiendish passion and cruelty. It may be magnificently unequal, but it must not shelve the responsibility of the evil and claim the good in the man whose initial essence it is. Both the good and the evil are parts of the human whole.

While acknowledging some inconsistencies in his soul-doctrine, we have to be grateful to Maeterlinck for his direction; his face is resolutely set forward, and the lack of pedestrian prudence is amply compensated for by the boldness and courage of his upward flight.

In the real buoyancy of his total outlook Maeterlinck is akin to our own Robert Louis Stevenson, especially in preaching the doctrine of the duty of happiness. Listen to Stevenson's words :—

There is no duty we so much underrate as the duty of being happy. By being happy, we sow anonymous benefits upon the world, which remain unknown even to ourselves, or when they are disclosed, surprise nobody so much as the benefactor.

The well-known lines from "The Celestial Surgeon" show the same spirit :—

If I have faltered more or less
In my great task of happiness ;
If I have moved among my race
And shown no glorious morning face ;
If beams from happy human eyes
Have moved me not . . .

It is interesting to compare the spirit that dictated these lines with that of Maeterlinck, whom some misguided critics choose to style "pessimist"! The following pieces are to be found in *Sagesse et Destinée* :—

In any case, it is useful to speak of happiness to the unhappy, to teach them to know it. They imagine so readily that happiness is an extraordinary and almost inaccessible thing! But if all those who can consider themselves happy were to say quite simply what are the sources of their satisfaction, it would be seen that there is never, between sadness and joy, any difference but that between a more smiling and enlightened acceptation and a hostile and gloomy subjection, between an obstinate and narrow interpretation and a broad, harmonious one. Then the miserable would exclaim :

"Is it only that after all? Why, we too possess in our hearts the elements of this happiness." And indeed you do.[1]

Is it not teaching happiness a little merely to speak of it? To utter its name every day, is that not to summon it? And is it not one of the beautiful duties of those who are happy to teach others to be happy? It is certain that one learns to be happy, and nothing is more easily taught than happiness.[2]

We are not to consider, however, that it is our mission in the world to seek for happiness for ourselves. The prize at the end of such a struggle is not worth the effort. If man seeks the highest perpetually for the race and for himself as a portion of the race, the happiness of the wise man will be his. The quest of the Blue Bird is the quest for this—the glad wisdom of the sage. After an ideal philosophic picture of wisdom, we find :—

Wisdom progresses more rapidly in happiness than she would have done in unhappiness.[3]

Happiness, in general, Maeterlinck considers more educative for the soul of man than misfortune ; we are told that it counts more for man's progress to have taken one small step forward in the matter of happiness than to have made many steps in unhappiness.

Yet here, too, we have an apparent contradiction, as, in another place, we are told that a man is nobler for having suffered a great misfortune than he would have been had he lived in the midst

[1] *Sagesse et Destinée*, pp. 6–7. [2] Ibid. pp. 126–7.
[3] Ibid. p. 139.

of quiet, unruffled joy. The contradiction, however, is more apparent than real. In the second case we should take it that the so-called happiness is more a shallow indifference than real happiness, which is, after all, only arrived at through some measure of mischance and sorrow. The soul that has not known grief has not known joy, and the soul that has never been supremely glad never reaches the depth of sorrow. The ideal is that of "port after stormy seas," not a gentle, life-long rocking in the harbour. Those who learn with suffering how to rejoice are the only real teachers of joy to others, and it is the happiness won with a struggle that conduces most fully to progress in soul-development.

Following upon an extract from Marcus Aurelius, on the subject of grieving others, are found these words of Maeterlinck :—

> Is it not grieving oneself, and learning at the same time to grieve others, not to learn to be as happy as one can be ?[1]

It is the first step to real altruism : one of the noblest ideals for the race : happiness is a duty for the sake of others. It lies in our hands. It is not the hour, Maeterlinck tells us, that is charged to bring happiness to us. It is rather our duty to make the hour happy that comes to seek a refuge in our souls. Wise indeed is he who can welcome the hour with words of joy and calm. It is our positive duty to seek to amass

[1] *Sagesse et Destinée*, p. 145.

even the simplest causes of joy: we should neglect no occasion for being happy. By trying to experience what other men call happiness along with them at last we shall arrive at a reasoned happiness of our own.

Maeterlinck does not, like a certain school of modern writers, shirk responsibility for mankind: his altruism is wider. Those who advocate most strongly the doctrine of heredity, and try to press home the tremendous force of circumstances, of environment generally, would have us believe that man is a mere tool, as it were, in the hands of his ancestors, his contemporaries, and contemporaneous facts: his particular cast of mind he owes to his forefathers, the development of it to attendant circumstances. For his acts he is not responsible: his ancestors generated the tendency to act along certain lines, his environment encouraged the tendency and gave him opportunity. Even for his will—that subtle, vital essence—and the directing of it, according to this theory, he has no responsibility: the seed of will he owes to those who gave him life, and the ample or poor growth of the plant to the sunshine, or lack of it, in his surroundings. In short, whatever tendencies are present in him are the gift of a long line (known or unknown) of ancestors, while the development of these into good or evil acts is directly due to the situation in life in which he chances to be.

This theory really robs man of all spiritual power, of all responsibility for his own deeds and

character, allows him no freewill, no choice between good and bad (everything having been decreed beforehand, according to his ancestry), and strips him of every shred of dignity. He becomes nothing but a curious and ingenious piece of mechanism, unpossessed of, and unworthy of, a soul.

Such a materialistic theory is essentially a modern production, the outcome of the practical-scientific and sceptical spirit of the age. To this Maeterlinck's imaginatively scientific and spiritual outlook, and essentially ethical philosophy, are strongly opposed. He claims for man that he has, before everything, soul, nobility, dignity, and all the responsibility that comes with dignity and honour. Not that Maeterlinck disclaims or belittles the power of heredity; on the contrary, he laments its tremendous force (particularly in *Le Temple Enseveli*, in the essay called "La Justice"). But he gives man will-power that, actuated by the spiritual force that is in him, links him to the great spiritual force of the universe.

The outer world, in its working, must of necessity affect man, who is keenly alive, spiritually, to what goes on in the universe. Thus he may suffer evil chance, accident, loss, bereavement, sickness, and pain. Yet to such an extent is man the master of his own character and destiny, that these circumstances striking him from outside need have no effect on him but what he wills: the responsibility of the human race is with each man. So strongly does this sense of duty to the race

weigh with the man of high racial ideas, that it is in vain for Fate to buffet him and try to crush him. Once he has learned how to withstand her blows and to use them, so to speak, as the strokes of a worthy opponent, with whom he wrestles—in so doing he learns to wrestle better, and ever more strongly and courageously to withstand his adversary.

Maeterlinck insists repeatedly, that a man receives from life that which he seeks and prepares himself to receive (not simply that which heredity and environment bestow, willy-nilly, on him). The man who tries to win his own soul, to develop himself as a unit in the vast scheme of progress, sets out with the firm intention of receiving all the good that life can give him in its varied experiences, and draws from each event, propitious or not, all the good that it is capable of giving, and so comes from each successive fortune or misfortune the stronger and wiser for his experience.

Maeterlinck, then, considers man responsible for his acts, and for his character, for the root of character, which is will-power, and the fruition of it: the effect of the objective influences of his life and surroundings upon his subjective ego. In stating this theory Maeterlinck continually insists on the fact that the power of the subjective is vastly superior to that of the objective in the formation of human character. One passage in *Sagesse et Destinée* is expressed in so characteristically Maeterlinckian a style that it is worth

quoting, although there is no new idea in it beyond those mentioned :—

> Do not let us forget that nothing happens to us that is not of the same nature as ourselves. Every adventure that presents itself, presents itself to our soul in the form of our habitual thoughts, and no opportunity of heroism has ever offered itself to him who has not been a mute, obscure hero for many years. Climb the mountain or go down into the village, travel to the end of the world, or take a walk round the house, you will meet only yourself on the paths of chance. If Judas issues forth to-night, he will go towards Judas, and will find the opportunity to betray ; but if Socrates opens his door, he will find Socrates slumbering on the threshold and will have occasion to be wise.[1]

Has any philosophy ever given man more entire responsibility than this?

Maeterlinck teaches that it is in an increasingly larger and wider morale that the growing human soul must be trained. The encouragement to self-reliance, rather than to dependence on the efficacy of narrow orthodox creeds, is a counsel of progress. In daily life we can see thousands of instances of character ennobled and dignified by the effect of added responsibility and self-reliance. The Maeterlinckian philosophy puts our soul into our own keeping, and gives us full charge of it for better or for worse—mostly for better, as his theory would urge. From the spirit of the species, from the Spirit of the Universe, our individual spirit can learn and grow : it is ultimately a part of these, but its individuality in this life is its own.

Too long has man sought awards and rewards

[1] *Sagesse et Destinée*, p. 87.

from external sources; he is learning and must further learn to seek these in his own spirit. There it is that he finds his own material for happiness, not in the events of the world around. Thus one of the most socialistic of philosophers becomes, at a touch, the most individualistic. At times Maeterlinck appears to make his sage utterly neglect the outside world, and find in himself the whole universe *in petto*.

In his grand defiance of Fate to shake the steadfastness of the ideal wise man he builds up, Maeterlinck might almost have quoted the magnificent lines of Hamlet, on which he dwells so often :—

> Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice
> And could of men distinguish, her election
> Hath seal'd thee for herself; for thou hast been
> As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing,
> A man that fortune's buffets and rewards
> Hast ta'en with equal thanks: and blest are those
> Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled,
> That they are not a pipe for fortune's finger
> To sound what stop she please. . . .

The truly wise man, according to Maeterlinck, recognises that the *Deus* ex *machina* goes for nothing in the making of character, that it is the *Deus* in *machina* that counts. Outside events are powerless to affect the sage, except in so far as he will. It is not the event that moulds him, but the spirit in which he receives it. That is the only thing that matters. If the mind is set towards nobility of character, let events called

fortunate or unfortunate come as they may, they do but swell the noble stream.

One may trace here the influence of the old stoic philosophy. Marcus Aurelius, so much quoted by Maeterlinck, writes :—

> As for the things themselves, they touch not the soul, neither can they have any access unto it : neither can they of themselves anyways either affect it or move it. For she herself alone can affect and move herself, and according as the dogmata and opinions are, which she doth vouchsafe herself, so are those things which as accessories have any co-existence with her.[1]

And again :—

> The things themselves that affect us, they stand without doors, neither knowing anything themselves nor able to utter anything to others concerning themselves. What, then, is it that passeth verdict on them? The understanding.[2]

Such is also Maeterlinck's attitude : the wise man rises superior to Fortune's buffets and rewards, and dominates Fate by receiving calmly all that comes to him. But Maeterlinck goes even farther, and represents his sage (who is also something of a clairvoyant) as actually checking, by his very presence, the blows of Fortune, levelled not only against himself but against those around him.

Maeterlinck makes out a very fine theory for the sage and his effect on Destiny, then shatters, at a blow, all his lofty fabric. In *Sagesse et*

[1] Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Book V. xvi.
[2] Ibid. Book IX. xiii.

Destinée [1] he tells us that the sage creates for himself, as it were, a lighted zone that acts as a place of refuge for the minds that pass that way. The minds that enter here have nothing to fear from chance. There are misfortunes in which Fate does not persist in the presence of a soul that has more than once conquered it.

> The sage that passes interrupts a thousand dramas.[2]

The sage himself has no drama, and few are enacted around him. He paralyses the force of Destiny. The tragedy of Elsinore could not be imagined, had a sage, instead of an irresolute thinker like Hamlet, been there.

> The catastrophes of Elsinore only take place because all the souls refuse to see; but a living soul constrains all others to open their eyes.[3]

What a weapon the wise man would hold in his hand were this theory true! But a few pages farther on, in the same volume, it is shattered. We are told that there are misfortunes and mischances over which the sage has no influence. It happens often that the wise man effects practically nothing, on arriving—it may be because he comes too late, or passes too quickly, or has to contend with forces accumulated by too many beings during too long a space. He works no external miracles, and never saves what could not have been saved according to the ordinary laws of life, and he him-

[1] *Sagesse et Destinée*, p. 33. [2] Ibid. p. 33. [3] Ibid. p. 44.

self may be carried away by some great inexorable hurricane.[1]

Why write the first beautiful, courageous passage, if the second be true? It is the old story, "Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther," but "thus far" is a very little way.

Putting aside the influence, small or great, which the presence of the sage has, voluntarily or involuntarily, upon the lives of those around him, the doctrine that his own peace of mind and ultimate happiness lie with himself alone is by no means new or original on the part of Maeterlinck; it belongs to the temper of philosophy through all the ages, but the expression of the same idea has frequently altered, and a new way of expressing an old truth is sometimes more convincing than the old way.

We are not to imagine, Maeterlinck tells us, that, when Paulus Æmilius loses his sons, because, to the outward eye, he preserves his philosophic calm, he does not feel the loss, and that human pain and grief are dead in him. The greater the soul is, the greater is its capacity for grief and joy: petty souls have pain and pleasure in the measure of their capacity. What the superficial eye misinterprets in the philosophical soul is its alchemy of beauty, its harmony of proportion, springing from physical and moral control and working steadily towards the ideal. Acute joy and pain mingle in the intensest beauty in that upward-striving: so strong is the current that all is swept

[1] *Sagesse et Destinée*, pp. 81–3.

upwards with it, instead of deflecting or even checking its course.

Life, we are told, is only unequal in the desire of the individual. The stream of life flows everywhere, by prison and palace, in sun and shade alike. It does not matter to us what the extent, the depth, the force of our stream is; what does matter is the purity and capacity of the cup which we plunge into it for our draught, the cup moulded by our own thoughts and feelings.

> We can only complain of Destiny in one respect: that is, that she has not given us the notion or desire of a larger, more perfect cup. Yes, the sole inequality is in the *desire*, but we only become conscious of that inequality at the very moment when it begins to disappear.[1]

The expression of the idea is striking and picturesque, but unfortunately, it is incomplete. Suppose, for the sake of keeping the metaphor, that the cup is made of our thoughts and feelings, that it is our desire, how many of our poor humanity are there who must *perforce* drink of the stream at hand, and plunging in their cup, bring it up full of turgid, muddy water, or, dipping it among the shallows, draw it out half-filled? How many are there whose thirsty souls have naught to satisfy them but the mockery of an empty cup? No philosophy is universal that omits a portion of mankind from its statements on life. Even Maeterlinck, who has unusual courage and desire for truth, not excluding that truth which, at the outset, looks

[1] *Sagesse et Destinée*, pp. 292–3.

ugly on the surface beside the beauty of illusion—even Maeterlinck sometimes forgets that it takes *all* life to make the universal.

It is this passionate desire for truth that makes him appear at times to change front. Early he thought the truth of life lay in the tragedy or shadow of it; later, he came to believe that it lay in the sunshine, and more than once he assures us that man learns more from happiness than from grief. We saw him struggling against the dread phantom of younger days, against Fate and Death, gloomy forms that beset the path of many an earnest thinker. But the ethical purpose beats like a pulse through all the tragic region, and those who listen can hear the steady indication of life at each stage of the way.

He is, from the outset, determined to find the good and true in the world, and to proclaim it aloud. His is no shallow optimism, founded on natural serenity of mind, due to serenity of fortune, and looking on calmly and philosophically at the woes of others. He has fought every inch of the way; the shadows have gathered round him; he has suffered, alone, and with others. But the will to win a way to serener air, to take a firmer grasp of the unreal and shadowy, to make a pure and complete whole, has carried him through, and, in his later work, he preaches a gospel as cheerful as any that modern times have produced. In "Les Rameaux d'Olivier" he writes:—

Since we have the choice of an interpretation which makes the background of our existence one of light or of shadow, it would be

foolish to hesitate. In the most insignificant circumstances our ignorance generally offers us only a choice of the same kind, that is not forced upon us any more than this. Optimism so understood has nothing feeble or puerile about it; it has not the maudlin air of happiness one sees on the peasant as he leaves the inn; but it holds the balance between what has happened and what may happen, between fears and hopes; and if the latter be not heavy enough, it adds to them the weight of life.[1]

Maeterlinck does not fail to realise that, in the weight of life, there is both a pessimism and an optimism, that all philosophic thought, even though leaning to the side of the former, is progress of a kind: truth under a different aspect. He asserts that the last half-century has brought more advance with it than many former centuries, and yet he declares his belief that the world is on the brink of a new pessimism. If it is a question of action and reaction, the swing of the pendulum will restore the balance in time. He is, therefore, by no means despondent at this idea. He has a profound belief in the spiritual force of man, from the point of view both of recuperation and development. He is, amongst modern philosophers, the one who has the greatest faith in mankind: in human nature he finds also, intrinsically, the Divine nature. His optimistic belief is not, then, in any external agency that will enlighten man by means of sudden revelation or inspiration; it is, rather, in man himself, in his own inborn qualities and his own spiritual force. Amongst these vital qualities, intelligence plays a very large part. Maeterlinck claims the

[1] *Le Double Jardin*, pp. 293–4.

development of the intelligence as one of the special aims of life, whose goal is perfection in all the qualities appertaining to it. Those periods therefore, in the world's history, which have contributed most to the training of the intelligence, will, according to his theory, be those which conduce most largely to the cultivation of morality, in its widest sense, as affecting the race. Hence, Maeterlinck considers, last century has been more beneficial to the morale of humanity in general than a thousand previous centuries.

His use of the word "intelligence" is, however, somewhat confusing. He sometimes speaks enthusiastically of the "intelligence" of flowers, bees, dogs, etc., and at other times he declares equally emphatically that man is the only intelligent being in the world, that he represents a special form of life on this planet, being endowed with a faculty not possessed by any other creature on it. One can perceive a shade of difference in meaning in the uses of the expression, but it might perhaps have been better to use some such word as "intellect" for the special quality of man, if one were going to allow intelligence to the lower order of creatures.

We have seen that Maeterlinck recommends to man the cultivation of his "intelligence" to the extreme of its capacity. He goes even farther and suggests that what is mentioned in Church doctrine as the unforgivable "sin against the Holy Ghost" is sin against the health of the human intelligence, in attempting to dethrone it from its supreme place.

He considers it the duty of man to follow the intelligence wherever it may lead; he must not hesitate to accept the conclusions of his intelligence, even though they are contrary to all that tradition, early teaching, habit, and inclination have made dear and familiar to him. He is out in quest of truth and must be satisfied with nothing less, and intelligence is his best guide.

The scientific type of mind that continues to experiment, and will not accept error, is one of the most progressive intellectual forces in the modern world. It is largely his admiration for this type of mind that induces Maeterlinck to declare that curiosity is more necessary to man than wisdom. Granted that it is a noble curiosity that drives man on to experiment, to seek, to test, to prove, and so to progress, are we to consider that reflection upon the experimental, the drawing of ethical teaching from the proven and unproven, in short, the noble work of the philosopher and sage, is going to pale before the glories of the experimental?[1] Is not Maeterlinck here placing the intellectual above the moral element, and is that not, *au fond*, contrary to the spirit of his philosophy? Has not his keen sympathy with the scientist for the moment obliterated the sage from his view? And the modern world cannot do without his sage; it is one of the ideals to which it has already begun to cling. The onward rush of the conqueror is fine, inspiring, but he who solidly establishes the conquest is none the less worthy of admiration.

[1] *Vie des Abeilles*, p. 275.

In "L'Inquiétude de Notre Morale," Maeterlinck marks off, in our reason, in which our morale is formed, three regions: *sens commun* (common sense), *bon sens* (good sense), and *raison mystique* (mystical reason).

The first protects our daily life, chiefly from the physical point of view of individual comfort and well-being. Some men never go beyond this stage.

The second is still an affair of daily life, but it concerns a loftier point of view, the social. It does not rise into pure altruism, however; its apparent altruism has, at bottom, the sentiment of utility. It is merely a finer egoism than common sense.

The third is largely composed of imagination, a spiritual faculty. It has in it the root of our moral life, and it is this power also that supplies the inspiration for scientific discovery, furnishing the hypotheses on which the scientist works.

This faculty it is in us, Maeterlinck says, that outruns our definite knowledge, anticipates our conquest of the unknown, and helps to put us in touch with the spiritual world. In æsthetics, imagination and mystical reason reign almost supreme. In science, there was at one time a tendency to banish them, as having no right to the domain, but now, as we have seen, they are intuitively concerned in every step of advance. In morality, they are vital, otherwise it would fall in ruins to the ground.

Probably it was something of this same spiritual and imaginative force that gave to men the so-

called "revelations" of the positive religions, hence styling themselves "revealed."

This spiritual force enters largely, it would seem, into what Maeterlinck calls "conscience." This word embraces a great deal in his philosophy. In its widest use, it stands for the whole morale of man as affected by his intellect; it implies the full consciousness of ideas (as opposed to the "inconscient," the sub-conscious), plus the added moral force that the continually increasing intellectual riches bring with them. But Maeterlinck does not always have the same value for his "conscience"; sometimes it would appear to be used in an almost entirely intellectual and sometimes in a purely ethical sense, with a meaning similar to that given in ordinary conversation to the English word "conscience." To take an example, in the following passages the meaning of the word seems to vary between "consciousness," "conscience," and something for which we have no one English word, approaching, in meaning, the ego.

In *Sagesse et Destinée* we find:—

> The wise man knows that without its being necessary for a superhuman happiness to come and teach it to him. The just man knows it too, even when he is less wise than the wise man and when his "conscience" [here = consciousness?] seems less developed, for it is remarkable that an act of justice or of goodness brings with it a certain consciousness that is inarticulate, often more efficacious, more devoted, more maternal, than that which springs from deep thought. It brings notably a sort of special consciousness of happiness.[1]

[1] *Sagesse et Destinée*, p. 29.

In the two pages that follow the word appears to be used in the same variable manner.

These pieces from *L'Intelligence des Fleurs* seem to show a change in the meaning of the word "conscience":—

> We must also keep in reserve some sumptuous virtues, so as to replace those which we abandon as useless; for our "conscience" [= conscience?] requires food and exercise.[1]
>
> The only point that touches us, in the question of persisting to eternity, is the fate of this little portion of our life which perceived phenomena during our existence. We call it our "conscience"—[consciousness + conscience?] or our ego.[2]

Other examples, of apparent ambiguity of meaning, are to be found in *Le Double Jardin*.

Apart from the confusing use of the word in more than one sense, Maeterlinck appears to vary in his estimate of the place of "conscience" in the life and development of man. Sometimes it seems to be the acme of man's intellectual and moral wealth, the desire to increase his "conscience" showing simply as man's desire to rise in the scale of being. At other times this "conscience," which raised man above the level of the brute creation, is made to take a secondary place. (Perhaps, however, this is also a question of using the word in different senses.)

In "L'Accident"[3] Maeterlinck places instinct above "conscience," in comprehension of the value

[1] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, p. 179.
[2] Ibid. p. 279. [3] Ibid.

of life, and makes it equivalent in extent to intelligence or reason :—

> The attitude of the intelligence, reason, "conscience" [= consciousness?], as you are pleased to call it, is extremely interesting. . . .[1]
>
> . . . Another personage leaps upon the scene. He is called Instinct, the Unconscious, the Subconscious—*as you will, and what matters it?* . . . He knows, besides, that all these ornaments, from the height of which he is despised, are ephemeral, not to be taken seriously, and that he is in reality the sole master of the human dwelling. . . .[2]
>
> . . . The subconscious is always equal to all imaginable situations. . . .[3]
>
> . . . Let us at once inquire of ourselves whether we can, if not perfect instinct, *which I believe to be always perfect*, at least bring it back nearer our will, loosen its bonds, and give it back its original elasticity.[4]

Thus "conscience," which Maeterlinck elsewhere describes as reigning supreme, including a man's past, present, and future, gives way here also to instinct, a faculty lower in the scale, and in *Sagesse et Destinée* it is made secondary to a higher spiritual perception :—

> Still wiser is he in whom joys and griefs not only augment "conscience" [consciousness? or consciousness + conscience?], but show at the same time that there is something higher than even "conscience."[5]

At other times Maeterlinck draws a distinction between "conscience" and "sagesse," and between "sagesse" and "raison."[6] Reason, we are

[1] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, p. 240.
[2] Ibid. p. 242.
[3] Ibid. p. 246.
[4] Ibid. p. 250.
[5] *Sagesse et Destinée*, p. 87.
[6] Ibid. p. 67.

told, opens the door to wisdom, but the most living wisdom is not to be found in reason. It is reason that closes one door against evil destinies, while wisdom opens another to admit propitious fates. It was wisdom that forced reason to admit, after a struggle, that we must love our enemies and return good for evil. Wisdom is rather an appetite of our soul than a product of our reason.

We saw that Maeterlinck made reason parallel with, or rather equivalent to, conscience, which we must therefore judge is lower in the scale than wisdom.

A little later in the same book we find it said that wisdom is only the sentiment of the infinite applied to our moral life.

> Might it not be said, the section concludes, that wisdom is the victory of Divine reason over human reason ?[1]

Also in *Sagesse et Destinée*, Maeterlinck writes :—

> All that exists consoles and strengthens the sage, for wisdom consists in seeking and admitting all that exists.[2]

There is, in the various definitions of wisdom in Maeterlinck, a perpetual insistence upon the ethical, as well as, and rather more strongly than, upon the intellectual element in it, that makes his dictum that curiosity is more necessary to man than wisdom, all the more difficult to understand as part of the Maeterlinckian philosophy.

[1] *Sagesse et Destinée*, p. 70, cit. p. 71. [2] Ibid. p. 210.

Yet, as we have seen, the intellectual plays a very large part, it being held man's duty to follow his intellect *wherever it may lead*. The more surprising is it, therefore, to find that Maeterlinck's tendency to the mystic, his love of mystery, leads him into a depreciation of the clear guidance of reason. In *Sagesse et Destinée* (Section XXXII) he quotes Fénelon's saying that "our reason only consists in our clear ideas." Maeterlinck goes on to say that Fénelon might have added that all the best in our soul and character is found especially in our ideas that are not quite clear. Then, in a beautiful passage, he pictures the human soul with its wealth of ideas already clear and bright, these each awakening in turn ideas that are still subconscious, slumbering, as it were, on the threshold of clarity. These, in their turn, as they brighten, rouse still another group of ideas, the place of the awakened ideas being taken by those whose turn it is to awake next.

In this passage we suddenly feel ourselves pulled up by this sentence :—

> A beautiful, clear idea that we awaken in ourselves will never fail to awaken in its turn a beautiful obscure idea, and when the obscure idea has become clear as it grows old—*for is not perfect clearness usually the sign of the lassitude of ideas?*—it too will go and awaken another obscure idea, more beautiful and lofty than it was itself in the shade. . . .[1]

If perfect clearness be, as Maeterlinck says, the sign of lassitude of ideas, then our intellect must

[1] *Sagesse et Destinée*, p. 76.

never seek after clearness, or be content to be stocked with ideas in a state of lassitude. Is it not towards perfect clearness that every human intellect strives? Is not this a contradiction of the ideal of intelligence, for the sake of the beauty of mystery, elsewhere so strenuously opposed?

Followed out, would such a theory not lead the philosopher to desire mystery rather than light, illusion rather than truth? Or can we simply take it that *no* idea is meant to persist, but simply to pass through the brain, leaving itself transformed and beautified in the next new idea that comes? Is it simply a way of expressing the fact that our views change from day to day, as we develop, and is it that Maeterlinck chooses to call the transformed and developed old idea a new one? So read, the theory would seem to justify itself. Or is it that the life-purpose of an idea is its growth towards perfect clearness, as that of mankind is growth towards fully developed humanity (physical and mental), from which point onwards decay and decline set in, and the summit of perfection is occupied by the next in development?

CHAPTER V

MAETERLINCK'S PHILOSOPHY (*continued*)

VIEWS ON RELIGION

Mystery and its value—symbols—moral sense.
Justice and injustice.
Avoidance of definite forms of religious belief.
Positive religions and harm done.
Attitude to Christianity—Man's mission in world.
Religion and morality—Idea of God—Nature of World-Spirit.
No personal God—God of Justice—World-plan.
Decrease of number of gods—Idea of immortality.
Conditions of after-life—Ego and memory: Religions and ego.
Future consciousness—Character of infinity.

A CLINGING sense of mystery abounds in Maeterlinck; even in his clearest thought there is the background of the *mystère*, haunting and shadowy in the early works; in the later the subtle suggestion of a delicate presence. Man, he says, is only now beginning to learn something of the wonderful forces at work in this world; about his position, or the position of his world in the universe, he knows practically nothing.

It is to man's inherent sense of mystery that religions have made their appeal.[1] Man must

[1] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs:* "L'Inquiétude de Notre Morale," pp. 167–8.

satisfy the needs of his being, which differs from that of any other creature in the universe. Among its characteristics one of the most notable, according to Maeterlinck, is moral aspiration, which emanates partly from intelligence. But there is, too, an element that has always preceded this, and has appeared independent of it, and man has sought elsewhere, especially in religions, for the explanation of the mysterious instinct stirring in him. Now that religion can no longer explain anything, nor satisfy the needs of man, we have no right, simply for the sake of satisfying our reasoning faculty, Maeterlinck argues, to suppress summarily this inherent human instinct.

One of man's duties is to seek to unravel the mystery that lies around him; not to go through the world with blind faith and trust in some superior being, but to use all his mental and moral strength to understand the beautifully and strangely mysterious universe. It may be that, in his search, man only displaces the seat of mystery. But even that is always a gain, a step nearer the truth.

Those who, for the human race, attempt to penetrate the wonderful unknown and throw some light into the shadows are the pioneers, the leaders of men. The study of the great mystery of the universe is the noblest to which man can rise. However far he goes, a man will never cease to find the mysterious in the world: it is hardly reduced by the growing clearness of truth. It is present in everything, and truth only, as yet,

illumines one side, to throw the other into the shadow of the undiscovered.

For a true conception of the universe a sense of mystery and a sense of space are indispensable. Without these the imagination is feeble and cannot take the first step towards the understanding of the boundless infinite, in which the human soul flounders pitifully. Man must realize that much lies ready to his hand that is not yet within his grasp, but that, for progress towards the ultimate good, in which understanding plays so large a part, "a man's reach must exceed his grasp."

But the grasp is steadily increasing: man is gradually reducing the unknown, he is gradually seeing his way in the world more clearly. And as he sees more clearly the number of symbols of all sorts diminish (as the number of gods has diminished), until, at last, man sees that the power that he ascribed to Nature, to the gods, lies really within himself. That is a long stride in the direction of progress. The more man can succeed in relating the puzzling problems of the world to the mystery of his own being, the nearer is his approach to final discovery.

> It is in reality preferable, every time such a thing is possible, to trace the source of mystery back to ourselves; thus do we restrict by so much the fatal field of error, discouragement, and impotence.[1]

Yes, it is in man himself that the great mystery lies, in his spiritual perceptions and mysterious aspirations. Maeterlinck does not pretend to have

[1] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*: "L'Accident," pp. 249–50.

any solution of the enigma; he hopes for greater human understanding along with the spiritual development of the future. At the stage which we have reached the question is, he says, less to prove than to make attentive to the inexplicable. The hope of proof must be left to the future.

But whatever may be our hope of ultimate solution in our finite state, we cannot but question, as Maeterlinck does, whence comes man's moral sense, the sense without which he drifts on the sea of life like an uncaptained ship. Is it from Nature that he derives these moral principles which seem part of his very being?

One turns to Nature to find the answer. Looked at from the point of view of the old religions of the world, man's justice seemed to be copied from that of Nature. According to the strict tenets of the old orthodox Protestant Church, any one meeting with an untoward accident was supposed to be suffering punishment for his own or his family's sins. Nature was an instrument in the hands of the Deity, through which he could work his vengeance. The idea of expiating the crimes of one's ancestors struck the more barbarous mind as quite an equitable arrangement, just as the Highland blood-feud or the Corsican vendetta appeared not only fair, but indeed the only natural and suitable way of settling family quarrels. It was just and natural for man to take his vengeance and strike blow for blow; so, in primitive man's conception of a Deity, the Deity did the same, but on a larger scale; and though the fact of the

Deity's (implied) immanent goodness and justice put him beyond the pale of man, yet the root-ideas were the same: calamities were the act of an outraged God, dealt in anger because his majesty and power had been insulted.

When, instead of working out their own revenge, men began to put into the mouth of the Deity, "Vengeance is mine: I will repay," they merely removed from their own hands to that of their Divinity the responsibility of punishing the aggressor—many with the secret satisfaction that their God could make the punishment more effective. Now it was to this "God of Justice" that men imputed the idea that he would "visit the sins of the fathers on the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him"—obviously on account of that hatred.

In what way was this supposed chastisement of God "to the third and fourth generation" to be most evident? Through the working of Nature, especially by means of heredity. This seemed so admirably simple when man discovered it, so just, so sure, so relentless a way of working, that Nature, the instrument, seemed almost to be the God whose laws she executed.

But was it just? Was it right that the innocent descendants of an evildoer should share his punishment, mentally and physically, sometimes in even worse degree than himself? If man were to execute his vengeance so that the results could be felt to the third and fourth generations, he would, even by an uncivilised race, be deemed a

barbarian. Does not man here ascribe to his God feelings and actions of which he himself would be ashamed in his better moments?

Regarded, then, from the physical point of view, the continued suffering from age to age does not look like the action of a God of *Justice*, and is very far from being that of a God of *Mercy*. The righteous is struck at with the unrighteous, and the man of good principles, descended from those of loose morals, may strive as he will, yet there will be some hereditary taints from which he will always suffer, just as, with no merit of his own, the righteous or unrighteous might be placed in a position of wealth and ease, and never suffer from the temptations to crime, legal or moral (by no means synonymous), which beset those who have a desperate struggle for very existence. One seeks in vain to discover any moral principle in heredity. It would appear as if some blind chance had struck a few here and there, and then no longer concerned itself about its victims. Taken in general, the hereditary principle appears (as far as we see its working) distinctly non-moral.

The more closely the principle (if such it may be called) is studied, the more do injustices come to light. Suppose, for a moment, we regard the general principle as just, that evildoing is to be expiated by the suffering of continuous generations, what justice is there in the choice of crimes which taint physically the descendants of the criminal? Why should the children of a drunkard or a debauchee suffer horribly, while those of a

hypocrite, a slanderer, a murderer bear in their bodies no trace of their ancestor's baseness? The liar, schemer, hypocrite, slanderer each has done evil in his day, but physically neither he, nor any other, necessarily suffers for it.

Of mental suffering much the same may be said —witness our imbeciles and lunatics.

In the domain of morality the hereditary principle works more equably. The children of all evildoers risk suffering from the taint of their parents; evil instincts are apt to repeat themselves from one generation to another, though (another strange and inexplicable injustice) sometimes one generation is missed, and it appears that the taint is about to pass from the doomed family, when lo! the next generation brings it back in all its ugliness, still more hateful from the contrast of the purer atmosphere that had begun to diffuse itself. Atavism and reversion to type still require much explanation, both physical and moral.

But are we going to grant the justice of the general hereditary principle from the point of view of the individual? The idea that his individuality is continued in his descendants appeals to man's innate pride and tenacity of personal existence; but where is the human representative of justice who would sentence a whole family to punishment because of the father's sins? Examine Nature as we may, we are brought back again and again to the conclusion that

There is no physical justice springing from moral causes.[1]

[1] *Le Temple Enseveli*: "La Justice," p. 5.

For the individual the laws of Nature seem harsh, arbitrary, and unjust.

Another possible point of view is that of Nature herself. It may be, as Maeterlinck suggests, that we should not judge her morale according to our standards; she may have a morale of her own. Man has sought this, calling Nature God, and God of Justice, and yet he has, all the centuries along, had to confess himself baffled when he has tried to examine and analyse and justify the acts of his God. The point of view of the religious exponent has been: "That is just: why, I know not; but it must be just because it comes from a God of Justice."

Is not that, however, *au fond*, similar to the view that Maeterlinck takes, when he says—

> We have seen . . . that Nature does not seem just with regard to us, but we are totally ignorant whether she is not just with regard to herself. Because she does not concern herself about the morality of our actions, it does not follow that she has no morality, nor that our morality is the only possible one.[1]

What are we to judge from this? Give Nature a morale of her own, and you give her a certain personality, which you may call God. Maeterlinck does not call his Nature God, but he admits that, from some points of view, the terms may correspond. In the opening sentence of "La Justice"[2] he tells us that he is not writing for those who believe in the existence of one Great Judge, all-powerful and infallible, keeping a close watch over

[1] *Le Temple Enseveli*, pp. 52–3. [2] In *Le Temple Enseveli.*

all human thoughts, feelings, and actions, maintaining justice in this world, and completing it elsewhere.

Such a Deity Maeterlinck refutes, as he does the idea of justice in the physical world. After his emphatic denial of this latter, how does he justify his suggestion of a possible morality in Nature, to which we are blind? In this way: that Nature does what may appear to us unjust, because we live so short a time that we cannot see things in their full proportions, whereas she has centuries in which to repair her apparent injustices.

Maeterlinck questions what Justice is, seen from another height. Is *intention* of necessity the centre of her domain? May there not be regions where intention no longer counts? These questions and many others, he says, we should have to answer before deciding whether Nature is just or unjust with regard to the masses which correspond to her proportions. We have no idea how vast a future she has before her; she may perhaps proportion her justice to her duration, her extent, and her end, as our justice is proportioned to the brevity and narrow circle of our life. For centuries she may permit the continuance of an evil for which she has centuries to make reparation.

We are no judges of this; we see so little beyond ourselves. We do not even know with any certainty whether we shall survive this life, and if we do, of what nature the survival will be. It would appear reasonable, judging from the standpoint to

which thought and experience have brought us, to anticipate that some portion of our personality, of our nervous force, will not undergo dissolution.

Is not that a vast future (Maeterlinck writes), opened to the laws that unite cause and effect, and always end by creating justice when they meet the human soul and have centuries before them? Do not let us lose sight of the fact that Nature, if we say she is not just, is nevertheless logical, and even if we should resolve to become unjust, it would be very difficult to be so, for we must remain logical; and as soon as logic comes in contact with our thoughts, our feelings, our passions, our intentions, how is it to be distinguished from justice?[1]

The conclusion is that man judges from the point of view of the individual, whereas Nature (if she have a morale and justice of her own) judges and acts from the point of view of the race and its ultimate end, that, as yet, man cannot see. But, in the long run, her justice to the species as a whole does not, by one hairbreadth, alter the fact of her injustice to the individual. The net result of the French Revolution may have been an excellent thing for the people of France, but no sane, unbiased historian will attempt to justify its separate acts of assassination. Are we to put Nature's injustices aside, like these, in view of the ultimate general good?

It is interesting to notice the value and place given to justice by Ruysbroeck and Marcus Aurelius, both of whom strongly influenced Maeterlinck in more than one direction. The former is theological and, if we may say so, orthodox. He

[1] *Le Temple Enseveli*, pp. 55–6.

has a curious and interesting little chapter in *L'Ornement des Noces Spirituelles*, entitled "Trois Ennemis à vaincre par la Justice," in which he says :—

> Justice conserved in virtue and in virtuous works is the scruple that weighs as much as the kingdom of God, and it is by its means that we obtain eternal life.[1]

Evidently the "justice" here spoken of is human justice, inspired by the Divine, and thence proceeding outwards from man.

In Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* we find :—

> In the whole constitution of man, I see not any virtue contrary to justice whereby it may be resisted and opposed.[2]

Again :—

> He that is unjust is also impious. . . . For the nature of the universe is the nature, the common parent, of all, and therefore piously to be observed of all things that are.[3]

In this passage Marcus Aurelius accredits to Nature that inherent justice that Maeterlinck denies her, just as Ruysbroeck would ascribe to God the attribute of justice, which, once more, the more modern philosopher does not allow.

It is of vital importance for man to decide whence the sense of justice in the universe comes. The excuse for the injustice of humanity because

[1] *L'Ornement des Noces Spirituelles*, p. 139.
[2] Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Book VIII. p. 37.
[3] Ibid. Book IX. p. 1.

of that of Nature we have seen swept away. Maeterlinck writes :—

> Let us allow force to reign in the universe, and equity in our heart.[1]

Elsewhere he says that, to balance the injustice and cruelty of physical nature, man has, implanted in him, as deeply and strongly as Nature's qualities are implanted in her, other qualities, counter-qualities to those we see in Nature: he has, for instance, besides his inherent desire for justice, natural goodness towards his fellows and longing after the ideal. These inner voices it is that man should follow. In his own heart man finds a strong desire for equity; hence he seeks it in the world around, and, more than all, in the world-power—a force which he feels greater than he, which was before he was, and will, in all probability, continue to be after he is not. This World-Spirit man personifies (in order to understand him better and come closer to him) and calls God. Maeterlinck describes God as "the finest of man's desires." [2]

Man makes a noble conception of a being resembling himself, but with all his virtues developed to perfection and none of his vices. This being he seeks to find in the workings of the universe. Since the strongest desires in the heart of man are for truth and equity, he ascribes these in full measure to his God, but in

[1] *Le Temple Enseveli:* "Justice," p. 58.
[2] *Sagesse et Destinée*, p. 171.

the universe he finds no proof of them. The laws that dominate the physical world are: that might is right, that, in the struggle for life, the fittest survive, that the suffering from one physical act that has injured the body is the same whether the act was done from motives of good or evil. For instance, if a man plunges into the water to save a fellow-creature from drowning, the physical effects are the same as if he had fallen in in the act of pushing his neighbour into the water.

Why should man have this keen sense of justice if he is not to use it? When he does use it, it is to find himself surrounded by injustice. What is he to judge concerning the World-Spirit?

The early religions declared that God was the source of man's moral sense, rewarding man's good acts and punishing his evil acts.

Maeterlinck rebels against the elementary morality of reward for good actions: he considers such in the nature of a bribe, to be scorned by any one on a high moral plane. We are persuaded, he says, that, in the eyes of a wise God, to do our duty, without the hope of any reward—even if it were only the satisfaction of having done it—would have very much the same value as to do evil because it profits us. If God were as lofty as our ideals paint him, he should repulse all those who have done well in the hope of recompense or commendation, and only approve those who are virtuous because they love virtue more than God himself. The idea of reward for goodness is so puerile that

the only test of the really righteous would be their sure punishment, as they would then do good only for the sake of good, and for no other reason.

Thus it is from the apparent immorality of destiny that a higher morality for man is born ; as always happens, from the loss of one moral law comes the gain of a greater. From the very injustice of his God would spring the triumph of the justice of man.

Do not let us imagine, Maeterlinck writes, that the foundations of virtue collapse because God seems to us unjust. It would be in the evident injustice of its God that human virtue would at last find unshakable foundations.[1]

In his desire to raise the dignity of man's morale, Maeterlinck puts himself into a curious position here. One can see that the nobility of man increases with his sense of responsibility and independence : that, having in him this keen desire for justice, if he follow it out alone and unaided by any higher power, he is greater morally than if he were aided, since he contends alone against the universe and its ruler, a universe of injustice, in which he may suffer for just and unjust actions alike. He becomes a giant, a Titan in his struggle against, not only the world, but the *Deus in machina* and *ex machina.*

Yes, but (and here it is that Maeterlinck gives no satisfactory answer) whence would man's sense

[1] *Sagesse et Destinée*, p. 177.

of justice come, that sense on which he insists so strongly, if not from the World-Spirit, by whatever name we may choose to call it? We cannot make man into the magnificent spectacle of a solitary wrestler with the Universe and its God, except at the expense of our logic. Man is obviously the plaything of the *physical* forces of the world; he has not yet reached his ideal in moral or intellectual force: he is striving towards the realisation of an ultimate cause—driven on by his desire for truth and justice. His whole *raison d'être* is nullified, his strenuous sense of justice is belied, if, when he attains the ultimate cause, he finds no justice there. That a sense of justice should exist, as a vital principle, in man, and in man alone, springing from nowhere, that it should not pre-exist and co-exist in the final cause, points to man's sense, certainly as noble, but also as delusive, and, *per se*, an injustice.

In the argument of *Le Temple Enseveli* Maeterlinck continues to insist upon the position stated in *Sagesse et Destinée*. The World-Spirit allows the world to live in a perpetual state of injustice; it is therefore all the more difficult to account for man's sense of justice, which is very keen, if it is not allowed to atrophy for want of use. Whence does it spring? Is there any connection between man's (possible) physical sufferings after an act of injustice and the act itself? The man with a sense of equity, who has committed an injustice,

suffers sharply himself. He is also made to suffer in his relations with the world. That is to say, the sense of justice is both individual and social: it has to do with the relation of man to himself and to the world. Man is responsible to his own soul and to society for every act.

The old view of the subject has changed. Calamities may befall the man who has done an unjust act, calamities that were formerly ascribed to the vengeance of an outraged divinity. We do not now ascribe vengeance to the direct intervention of a Deity; we see that the man who has consciously deviated from the path of equity no longer goes with so sure a step the ways of the world. He has lowered his moral tone; his self-respect is lessened, his belief in himself, and consequently his sureness of his hold on life, begins to be shaken and he stumbles into misfortune and disaster. One cannot be consciously unjust without losing moral tone, and one cannot lose moral tone without suffering, which affects one's attitude to life, one's acts, and in time, it may be, even one's physical condition—so closely are the various functions of man bound together.

What looked, therefore, in the past, like a reprisal of physical nature, we see to be due to man's moral nature. It is purely in his own heart, then, that man must look for justice; no external agency will do for him what it is his highest function to do for himself. When he seeks within himself and finds the justice that the external

world has denied him, he finds an inborn human need satisfied :—

> The mind and character of man, his whole moral being, in a word, can *only* live and act in justice.[1]

This belief that the tendency towards equity in man is primary and not derived shows Maeterlinck's outlook to be on a really higher moral plane than the orthodox doctrines of the Christian religion held during nineteen centuries, the wonderful beauty and efficacy of the sacrifice being based upon man's inborn tendency to evil and sin, from which this alone could raise him. The Maeterlinckian philosophy takes a higher view of man *à priori*. Time and again we find such statements as this :—

> Our whole moral organism is made to live in justice, as our physical organism is made to live in the atmosphere of our globe. All our faculties depend upon it much more really than on the laws of gravitation, of heat, or of light, and when they are plunged into injustice they are really plunged into an unknown and hostile element.[2]

Such a philosophy is infinitely more hopeful and expansive in outlook than a theory which holds that man is radically evil though capable of redemption through an external source, however noble and spiritual that external source may be. Remove the external influence (spiritual or otherwise) before it has affected the larger portion of mankind, and "all our realm reels back into the beast." But deny that the core

[1] *Le Temple Enseveli*, p. 42.
[2] Ibid. : "Justice," pp. 43–4.

of man is evil, grant him an innate sense of justice, a soul striving for beauty, and though, in the struggle for life, with all the buffets of fortune, with his want of civilisation, he will make countless mistakes and fall into innumerable uglinesses, yet his path will be upward, towards permanent beauty and equity.

Maeterlinck considers morality, *qua* morality, more necessary to the growth of the human soul than any positive religion; he avoids any definite forms of religious belief; at times, he seems to show signs of theosophical leanings, but he says Amen to no already formed creed. He indues men, and among men especially the Sage, with the loftiest moral and spiritual possibilities. The Sage has faith in the ultimate good.

> Socrates has not to fear, like Macbeth, that everything will end badly. If everything does end badly, it is contrary to all expectation.[1]

This is, perhaps, the simplest expression of his optimistic outlook, and reminds one forcibly of Stevenson's vigorous declaration of faith, in one of the Vailima Letters: "I believe in the ultimate decency of things, aye, and if I woke in hell, I should still believe it!" Maeterlinck persists in his faith in the ideal destiny of man. He does not insist that all men should approach it by the same road, but that all men should have the same ideal moral purpose. Belief or unbelief, he tells us, matters little: what is important is the *manner*

[1] *Sagesse et Destinée*, p. 123.

of believing; the work is of less importance to the development of man than his method of doing it.

The methods that are to be condemned are the methods that do not make for progress; Maeterlinck is unmerciful to any method that would appear to have retarded the human race. Hence his attack upon positive religions, through which, he asserts, much time has been lost for mankind. The world might have been enlightened much earlier by principles of real equity, had it not been for the cramping force of positive religions. The old doctrine of reward and punishment, for instance, encouraged men to do good, with the ultimate hope of personal gain, spiritual, if not temporal; if not in this world, then far more lastingly—happiness to all eternity was to be the portion of the righteous. This childish morality was perhaps suited to the needs of a young, awakening world, but its persistence, Maeterlinck argues, has really delayed moral development.

> We no longer want the low, narrow morality of punishment and reward that positive religions offer us,

he writes in *Sagesse et Destinée*.[1]

Once again we hear the curious echo that sounds between Stevenson and Maeterlinck. Stevenson's words are:—

> It is time this world returned to the sense of duty, and had done with the word "reward."

[1] *Sagesse et Destinée*, pp. 175–6.

The lack of elasticity of growth, the fear, loyal but narrow, of betraying their doctrinal trust, the general desire not to venture off sure ground, have cramped the action of positive religions, as seen through their various Churches. Whether such elements belong merely to the practical working-out of these religions, or to their essence, the result is the same. The Church, once the leader in the thought of its time, has allowed itself to be outrun by the secular philosopher, and even then, still fearful of a rapid change, it has hung back, and acted as a drag on the steps of the real leaders of thought.

Of this phenomenon Maeterlinck is sensible when he says that the paths of the positive religions are " easy, but artificially lighted." He does, however, cast a backward glance at some of the beautiful illusions of these religions. He does not say that they have done *no* good in the world. He recognises that they have been of some benefit to humanity and aided in the civilisation of man. He allows that, for the very early rudimentary stages of mankind, some such positive beliefs were necessary ; they were all that man could grasp intellectually and morally. They were suited to his stage of development in civilisation. The elementary condition of mind must have particular and concrete ideas to grasp : it is not till a later stage that it can generalise.

With his intense love of the beautiful, Maeterlinck could not but be impressed by the real beauty at the heart of Christianity. Throughout *Sagesse*

et Destinée he is, as it were, dominated by the beauty of character and force of personality of Christ. It seems almost as if he could not release himself from his spell; there are perpetual allusions to him in the book. He imagines—

> a sage . . . a powerful and sovereign soul such as Jesus, in the place of Hamlet,[1]

and asks, in such a case, if it would have been possible that all should have ended in so black a tragedy.

Or again, he writes, Jesus Christ meets by the way a crowd of children, a Magdalen, a woman of Samaria—

> and humanity rises thrice to the height of God.[2]
>
> . . . . .
>
> And all the ways by which grief enters into us are defended by the angels. Did Jesus Christ not weep at the tomb of Lazarus?[3]
>
> Jesus dying for us, Curtius throwing himself into the chasm, Socrates refusing to be silent. . . .[4]

Again, in speaking of the ancient idea of duty, notably of the duty of avenging the slaughter of members of one's family, Maeterlinck remarks that the passing of a *sage* who said "Forgive your enemies," was sufficient to cause the whole sense of the duty of vengeance to be effaced.[5] It is interesting to observe that Jesus Christ seems at times to be Maeterlinck's ideal of the sage.

So the whole fabric of Christianity, particularly

[1] *Sagesse et Destinée*, pp. 43–4. [2] Ibid. p. 25.
[3] Ibid. p. 92. [4] Ibid. p. 117. [5] Ibid. pp. 155–6.

the central figure, seems to cling round Maeterlinck in this work. We find frequent allusions in the other works to Christian doctrine and practices, but nowhere is the personal note so strong as in *Sagesse et Destinée* and *Marie Magdeleine*, which is filled with the magnetic personality of Christ—not himself introduced into the drama except as a voice.

But he by no means agrees with the way in which the followers of Jesus Christ have worked out his doctrines, and he does not even grant complete human wisdom to the doctrines themselves, nor to the teacher of them. In " Le Règne de la Matière " we find such a phrase as this :—

. . . If the Ambassador of the Father were to come and visit our earth a second time to repair the errors and omissions of his first pilgrimage.[1]

Of these same errors much is said in the various works, to some of which reference has already been made : for instance, the doctrine of reward and punishment, common to practically all positive religions. One of the main points in the Christian teaching, and in the carrying out of that teaching, that Maeterlinck finds has actually hindered the growth of the world, is the question (really at the root of the doctrine of Christianity) of sacrifice, with its offshoots resignation and renunciation.

He would not do away with the beauty of altruism—far from it—but he claims (and justly)

[1] *Le Temple Enseveli*, p. 189.

that sacrifice, for the sake of sacrifice, giving up those things that the heart desires, simply because they are the desires of the heart, maltreating the body in the manner of the early ascetics or mediæval monks, has a dwarfing and stultifying effect on the human soul, which it was really meant to benefit at the expense of the vile body. Not that Maeterlinck recommends a life of voluptuous ease; he is, in many ways, a follower of Marcus Aurelius and the other stoics, and, like them, would demand that the treatment of the body should be simple, almost to austerity, "according to Nature," and the part Nature meant man to play in the physical world.

His point of view is this: Man, as a race, as a species, has a certain mission in the world. To discover what that is, he is still blindly groping. But it would seem, from all indications, that it is his duty to continue on this earth until his mission is accomplished. To this end he requires physical strength to help him in his struggle for moral and intellectual strength and beauty. In "Le Règne de la Matière" we find:—

> The utilisation, by means of intelligence, of all unconscious force, the gradual subjection of matter, and the search for its enigma—such is, for the moment, the most probable end, the most plausible mission of our species.[1]
>
> . . . . .
>
> That is not to say that the body is the irreconcilable enemy, as in the Christian theory. Far from it. First of all, let it be made as healthy, as robust, as beautiful as possible.[2]

[1] *Le Temple Enseveli*, p. 181. [2] Ibid. p. 184.

The blind sacrifice of the body or of the soul, though dictated of old by pure devotion to a noble ideal, does not contain at heart the beauty it appears superficially to have, because it lacks strength and insight and understanding.

Although for the mass the general notion of sacrifice due to a sense of duty is good, yet it is not the ideal, especially if the sacrifice be blindly performed. The world is full of beings at once noble and weak, who imagine that sacrifice is an end in itself. Far from it: the supreme virtue is to discover what to do with one's life, and to know to what to devote it.[1] Just as, in the past, the words of a sage on the forgiveness of one's enemies sufficed to change the idea of duty in the matter of vengeance, so perchance another wise man may come and change the notion of duty in the matter of sacrifice.

Meantime, Maeterlinck emphasises, certain ideas on renunciation, resignation, and sacrifice are exhausting, even more effectually than great vices and crimes, the most beautiful moral forces of humanity.[2]

Although resignation may be both good and necessary in face of the inevitable facts of life, yet whenever a struggle is possible, resignation is only a cloak for ignorance, impotence, or idleness. Similarly with sacrifice: it is noble when the necessity for it comes into our life, but there is no nobility of soul in going out to seek for it for its own sake. Generally speaking, it is much

[1] *Sagesse et Destinée*, pp. 154–5. [2] Ibid. p. 156.

easier to die morally and even physically for others than to learn to live for them. It is beautiful to give oneself, and it is only in giving oneself away that one learns to possess oneself really, but it is a poor thing to have to give to one's brothers *merely* the desire for sacrifice.

Maeterlinck insists strongly that one of the main duties of life is to train, cultivate, and ennoble one's intellectual and moral self, so that one may accomplish somewhat towards the end and aim of life, which is the perfection of itself. He places the so-called virtues that oppose this view ("e.g. blind submission and renunciation, a certain kind of humility, the spirit of penitence, . . .") among the parasitic virtues which really retard human growth.

From this point of view, the only thing we can offer as our contribution to the progress of mankind is the most perfect development possible of what is in our charge: it is a Divine mission to have a soul to prepare for the universe. Is it to be thought that when the universe considers the value of what is offered, the soul of a Socrates or a Marcus Aurelius, each having the content of a thousand lives on a lower level, will not count far more than the soul of him who has never taken one step towards moral development? If there be a God, will he judge the value of the sacrifice by the weight of the blood of our body, and will the vital blood of the soul, with all its noble moral experience, acquired through long years, count for nothing?

Why should we not confess frankly that the traditional Christian counsel, to weep with those who weep, to suffer with the suffering, to lay one's heart open to the rebuffs as well as to the caresses of the world, is *not* the duty *par excellence*? Tears and suffering are only salutary as long as they do not discourage our life.

We must remember, whatever be our mission in this life, our efforts and our hopes, that we are, above and before all, the blind depositaries of *life*. That is the only fixed point in human morality. We have been given life, we know not why, but evidently it is not for the purpose of injuring or destroying it. We are a special form of life on this planet; we possess the life of thoughts and emotions, and anything that tends to injure these is probably immoral. We should try to enlarge the scope of our faculties, to make them as beautiful and useful as possible:—

Before all, let us increase our faith in the greatness, the power, and the destiny of man.[1]

In the beginning of the essay entitled "Le Suffrage Universel,"[2] Maeterlinck tells us that for centuries Humanity has lived, as it were, half-way along the path of her possible development, the lofty heights of reason and feeling being hidden by thousands of prejudices, chiefly religious. Now that these artificial mountains, which clouded her real spiritual horizon, have, for the most part, dis-

[1] *Sagesse et Destinée*, p. 171. [2] *Le Double Jardin*, pp. 95–6.

appeared, Humanity is beginning to be conscious of herself and her real meaning, her place in the universe, and her final goal. She is beginning to realise that to do otherwise than follow out to the end the logical conclusions of her intelligence is useless trifling. She feels that to-morrow she must go to the length she did not go yesterday, and that by losing so much time between the stages of her journey she gains only a little delusive calm. In "Notre Devoir Social" we find:

> And do not let us fear that we may go too quickly. If, at certain times, we seem to be rushing on at a dangerous speed, it is only to compensate for the unjustifiable delays and make up for the time lost during centuries of inactivity.[1]

In his eagerness to push forward, Maeterlinck risks being unjust to the influences of the past that made for growth and development. Is it quite fair to put, without distinction, *all* "positive religions" together as forces only suited to the very early stages of man's growth? Although Maeterlinck talks frequently and frankly about Christianity and sees much of the real beauty in it, does he not in his attack on the so-called Christian virtues of sacrifice, resignation, and renunciation fail to appreciate the real good that Christianity has done to the world, the really necessary educative force it has been? We are at one with him upon the disastrously retarding effect of these virtues carried to excess, but it is on the general usage, and not on the excess, that judgment must

[1] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, p. 275.

be passed. Consider the Christian martyrs and ascetics. Men and women endued with such strong feelings and vigorous enthusiasms would of necessity have found some extraordinary outlet for their unusual personalities. Calm, ethical speculation would not have used up such full-bodied life. Whatever they did, they were bound to do it keenly, enthusiastically, until the warm, generous life began to cool in them. Lacking the outlet that religious enthusiasm gave them, they would, in all probability, have entered as warmly into a life of rampant vice. The martyrs who sacrifice themselves and the philosophers who weigh the value of the sacrifice are not made of the same stuff: humanity has need of both for its progress —far more need of these than of the products of blasé indifference of our present age.

That sacrifice, renunciation, and resignation are not ends in themselves even the modern Protestant Church will allow: humanity has outgrown that stage. But they were in the past nobler ideals than any others for which humanity was ripe: the choice, many a time, was between these and unbridled licence. Then, as Maeterlinck himself points out, in another connection, the act always lags so far behind the thought, that the thought must often rush to the extreme for the act to be even moderately far on the road that it would take. Leaders must be very bold, very audacious, for their followers to be even moderately courageous.

Although we have outgrown the narrow doctrines of our ancestors, can we say that time

has really been lost on the way? We know that Christianity has acted as a vastly civilising force in the past (although we all acknowledge that tremendous mistakes have been made, and are daily being made by zealots); which of us has any right to say that his own particular new creed would have done the good that Christianity has done—especially for women? What other theory of life the past world has ever seen would have raised them so much in dignity? Although modern humanity has still an immense amount to learn in this respect (and it is now probably *not* from Christianity that it will learn it), yet it is to Christian doctrine in the past that woman owes her first step to freedom.

There are two possibilities with regard to the origin of the Christian ideals: they have either been inspired in humanity by a guiding external spirit, such as the early Christians declared was the case, or they are human ideals, the outcome of racial development. If the former, then we must accept them in the Christian spirit, as spiritual commands. If the latter (to employ one of Maeterlinck's own arguments, used by him in speaking of social developments, but equally valid here):—

> Like every universal and imperious ideal, like every ideal formed in the depths of nameless life, it has primarily the right of realising itself. If, after its realisation, it is observed not to fulfil what it had promised, it will be right to think of perfecting it or replacing it. . . .[1]
>
> Nations are right, therefore, in rejecting provisionally what is perhaps better.[2]

[1] *Le Double Jardin*, pp. 101–2. [2] Ibid. p. 103.

Maeterlinck is very ready to recognise that human nature is extreme, that that is its strength and the cause of its progress; he should be ready to allow it to go to extremes in religion as well as in social government, both being vital and necessary to the progress of the species.

He considers it a fundamental mistake to base all morality on religion. He expresses himself thus on this point (in "L'Inquiétude de Notre Morale"):—

> Those who assert that the old moral ideal must disappear because religions are disappearing are strangely mistaken. It is not religions that have formed this ideal, but rather the ideal that has given birth to religions.[1]

The human soul is, and remains, profoundly human; a doctrine that stirs its innate humanity and naturally moral qualities and virtues is infinitely more efficacious than one which would raise it by means of some Divine external agency. In times of affliction, Maeterlinck insists, warm human feelings are more consoling than the noblest religious sentiments. To love and serve God the best that one can will not, apart from human love, strengthen and calm the human soul. God is really only to be loved and served with the intelligence and feelings acquired in one's contact with men.[2]

Further, Maeterlinck points out that the general level of morality has by no means fallen since

[1] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, p. 182.

[2] *Sagesse et Destinée*, p. 253.

the world entered upon this less religious epoch. Indeed, it has risen and it steadily continues to rise, because the general level of intelligence is rising. Herein Maeterlinck shows himself a courageous optimist. He believes so firmly that the ultimate good for mankind will come from within—from the continued cultivation of man's moral sense—that he does not regret, nay, he rather welcomes, external changes, provided that these show that the inner development be progressing.

In " Les Rameaux d'Olivier " we find his faith in man's sure progress boldly declared :—

> Is it not surprising, at the outset, that in spite of the weakening of the religious sentiment, and the influence that this weakening ought to have upon human reason, since it no longer has any interest emanating from the supernatural, in doing good ; and since the interest, springing from natural causes, that there is in doing it, is fairly questionable—is it not surprising that the sum of justice and goodness, and the quality of the general conscience, far from decreasing, have incontestably increased? I say incontestably, though it is indubitable that it will be contested.[1]

Maeterlinck finds in the present age, in spite of all its faults, real development in the goodwill of men, in justice, solidarity, sympathy, and hope.

In the present period many changes are taking place, more changes than in many past centuries. Present-day morality and religion alike are by no means standing still. While the former is on the increase, the latter seems to be disappearing. It is just that part of mankind that has always led

[1] *Le Double Jardin*, pp. 274–5.

the forward movements that is little by little leaving behind what is known as religion.

It is no new thing, in the history of the ages, for a religion to fade away; the end of the Roman Empire practically saw the end of paganism. But formerly, men passed from a crumbling temple to some new and stately fane, and now we are leaving the crumbling temple, to go whither we know not —it may be nowhere. Our moral principle seems to oscillate between altruism and egoism, between Tolstoyism and the doctrines of Nietzsche. The old creeds have ceased to satisfy us, and all the conditions of growth mean change. Even though the changes on which we have entered are radical changes, even though the whole fabric of religion is swept away, yet man has no cause to despair. Change of religion, even loss of religion, is far from being an evil. Sometimes, indeed, the change is more apparent than real; it is frequently only a change of epithet.

Rarely, Maeterlinck says, does a mystery disappear. Ordinarily it only changes its place. From a certain point of view, all the progress of human thought reduces itself to two or three changes of this kind—to have dislodged two or three mysteries from the place where they did harm, in order to transport them where they become harmless, where they can do good. Sometimes it is enough, without a mystery changing its place, if we can succeed in giving it another name. That which was called "the gods" is now called "life." And if life is just as inexplicable as the gods, we have at least gained this, that in the name of life no one has authority to speak, nor right to do, harm.[1]

[1] *Le Temple Enseveli*, p. 27.

Let the change continue, Maeterlinck would urge, so long as it is in the direction of progress and truth: seek truth above all, even at the expense of being disillusioned. And if you are disillusioned in the process, remember that the fault is yours, that it is because you are not yet noble enough in spirit to understand the beauty of truth, which is, and must be, more beautiful than any error. The gain overbalances the loss, for it is an illusion lost for a certainty gained.

And even if a disappearing truth should seem to leave a vacuum behind, there is no need to be afraid, or hasten to fill it by a truth in which we only half believe. As in physical life, so in moral: the need will, in time, create the organ it requires, and often a negative truth can suffice to set the rusty machinery in motion again. Even if all our faith should leave us, yet each of the noble efforts we have made to clarify it, each of the good thoughts we have added, every item of courage and sacrifice put forth in its name, will make its imprint upon our morale, and leave us the better for its stay.[1]

In "Notre Devoir Social," Maeterlinck speaks very boldly of the value of destructive forces. He says:—

> In all social progress the great work, and the only difficult work, is the destruction of the past. We have not to trouble ourselves as to what we shall put in the place of the ruins. The force of things and of life will readily set about the work of reconstruction. It is only too ready to reconstruct, and it would not be good to help

[1] *Le Temple Enseveli*, pp. 110–11.

it in its too-rapid work. Therefore let us not hesitate to use our destructive powers even to excess: nine-tenths of the violence of our blows are lost in the inertia of the mass, as the shock of the heaviest hammer is dispersed throughout a huge stone, and becomes, so to speak, imperceptible to the hand of the child who is holding the stone.[1]

If this be true with regard to social forces, is it not equally true of religion? It is true of any *living* force; it is only when the life begins to fade away from any institution, as from the functions of any individual, that one can no longer count on the law of growth and reparation. Until human nature, in any of its activities, ceases to grow and develop, one can count on the hackneyed scientific maxim that "nature abhors a vacuum," and depend upon the nature of the activity in question to make reparation for any loss.

Idea of God.

There is no indication in Maeterlinck that worship is to be given to any deity. On the whole, the writer tends to assert that the attitude required from us by the world-spirit is not an attitude of worship. We have not, he would argue, approached the problem of the spiritual in the universe in a proper way; we have created out of the spiritual force, for ourselves to worship, a personal being with our own virtues infinitely increased, and, incidentally, only a few of our vices, such as anger and a spirit of revenge.

Religion, Maeterlinck says, and especially the

[1] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, pp. 274–5.

Christian religion, has taught men much nobility of thought and action; the laying down of one's life for an enemy, simply because he is an enemy, has a certain sublimity in it that normal moral human teaching does not indicate. But, after all, is it a sane, healthy doctrine, suitable to the best sort of human development? Maeterlinck compares the Christian zealot, in his almost wanton enthusiasm for self-sacrifice, penitence, mortification, and martyrdom, with the juggler who plays with balls of fire on the summit of a steeple. He may have magnificent courage and daring, but it seems useless as compared, for instance, with that of the man who plunges into water or fire to save a child. The virtues of the first are more striking, but less humanly useful, and do not raise the general level of mankind so much as the apparently less lofty, but more wearable, virtues.

Religion has had the effect of rendering life artificial. Maeterlinck writes, in "Le Pardon des Injures":—

> Religion raised all souls, mechanically, so to speak, to heights that we should attain by our own powers.[1]

Instead of finding the fundamental moral reason for acting in one way rather than another, religionists declared, "We must pardon because God wishes it; we must be good because God expects it of us," and so on. This childish morality of doing right to please some great external force

[1] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, p. 231.

stamps not only the beliefs of positive religions, but also the character of the God set up to be worshipped. In *Le Temple Enseveli* the writer phrases the extent and height of man's conception of God thus :—

> God, who is everywhere where we are, since he is made only of our desires.[1]

In this and other passages Maeterlinck shows that he does not demand a personal and ever-watchful Deity—nay, he directly opposes such an idea. It does not answer, he says, to any need of his heart or soul, and his intellect rejects it. The rudimentary stage of culture, in part, and in part the desire to immortalise and deify human qualities, have been tributary to the formation of this idea.

When we look around to find the evidence for such a notion we seek in vain ; indeed, all appears to point the other way and to warn us that the difference between our conception of the universe and that of our fathers should bring with it a difference in attitude towards the fundamentals of the universe. If we have not yet discovered what the great unknown is, at least we know in part what it is not, and if we were to resume the attitude of our fathers we should be assuming it towards what we know does not exist. For, granted that it is not yet proved that the unknown is not attentive, personal, nor supremely intelligent and

[1] *Le Temple Enseveli*, p. 24.

just; granted that we cannot absolutely assert that it has not the form, intentions, passions, vices, nor virtues of man, yet it is infinitely more probable that it is ignorant of all that seems to us most important in life. We must grant, too, that we have no indisputable proof that the infinite and invisible are not perpetually on the watch around us, doling out to us good and evil fortune, according to the tenor of our acts, guiding our fate at every step of the way, and arranging every detail of our birth, our future, our present and after life, according to incomprehensible and irrevocable laws. Yet the probability is incomparably greater that the infinite and invisible do intervene momentarily in our lives, but in quite another way: in the form of vast, blind elements, indifferent to our welfare, permeating the world around, and us with it, fashioning and quickening us, yet without a suspicion of our existence, as do elemental fire and water and light and air.[1]

Later, in the same volume, Maeterlinck speaks of

> sentiments that correspond to no accepted, precise, living idea—for instance, those that relate to a determinate God, more or less anthropomorphic, attentive, personal, and providential.[2]

In the end of "Les Rameaux d'Olivier" we find the same idea expressed more boldly:—

> We no longer believe that this world is the eyeball of *the* only God, who is attentive to the least of our thoughts; but we know that it is in the possession of forces quite as powerful and quite as

[1] *Le Temple Enseveli*, pp. 108–9. [2] Ibid. p. 119.

attentive, of laws and duties that it is for us to comprehend. That is why our attitude towards the mystery of these forces is changed. It is no longer fear, but boldness. It is no longer the kneeling of the slave before the master or creator, but it allows us to look frankly as from equal to equal, for we bear in ourselves that which is as mysterious as the deepest and greatest mysteries.[1]

Another factor which, in Maeterlinck, as in so many others, contributes to the rejection of the personal and paternal Deity is the fact of the continual and unhindered suffering in the world, the perpetual misery of many of the human race, who seem least to deserve it, the wrong unredressed, and dominant injustice. It *was* quite right, from the point of view of the religious believers, that men should have raised their eyes towards the God they considered indisputable, immeasurably good and just, unchangeable and certain. But to-day what have we to offer to those seeking eyes, once we draw their gaze from the ordinary truths and experiences of daily life? What can we say in the face of triumphant injustice, unpunished and prosperous crime, if we draw man beyond the more or less compensating laws of conscience and internal happiness? What explanation can we give of the dying child, of perishing innocence, of the injustice of chance, if we seek to find one that is more lofty and simple and striking than those with which we must content ourselves in ordinary life, since these are the only explanations that correspond to certain vital realities?[2]

[1] *Le Double Jardin*, p. 296.
[2] *Le Temple Enseveli*, pp. 146–7.

In the face of distressing human circumstances any man of really good will, with even a remote portion of the power we ascribe to our Deity, would exercise his power so that his fellow-creatures should suffer less misery. Is it not, then, a false conception of a God to imagine that He is an amplified and purified essence, so to speak, of man? Whatever this Spirit of the universe may be, a deified and glorified man seems one of the least likely of possible conceptions.

Human nature, being endowed with the faculty of reason and the consuming desire for knowledge and truth, will not readily rest content with finding what God is *not*; it has exhausted its finest intellects in past ages, and is still exercising, and will continue to exercise, its most eager souls, in order to find that *positive* truth towards which negative truth is but a step on the way. Man seeks God everywhere—no longer expecting Divine revelations and beatific visions—but scientifically and philosophically observing the workings of the universe, and trying to draw from them, it may be, some glimmer of light to throw upon the great mystery that surrounds the world. Man used to kneel in reverential worship at the feet of an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent Deity, sometimes master, sometimes father.

Now, as the mystery seems beginning to unfold itself little by little, as science yields up one secret of Nature after another, man feels that the World-Spirit is more fraternal in its workings than paternal —like man, ever experimenting and making mis-

takes and trying afresh—a spirit, in fine, which may aid, but can hardly guide, him, of a certainty not in moral principles, such as man understands them. Maeterlinck, with his indomitable courage and ever forward outlook, draws strength and encouragement from the fact. What alarms us and overwhelms us, he says, is the idea of the presence of a God in the world, a God whose will is all-powerful and ever-present, who yet resembles man.[1] We should not fear nearly so much a superhuman force that did not resemble us.

In *L'Intelligence des Fleurs* he tells us that the Spirit of the earth, who is probably that of the whole universe, acts, in the struggle for life, exactly as a man would do, using the same methods, the same logic, the same means, the same experiments, and making the same errors. He sees and finds himself little by little, as we do; his ideal is often confused, but the great lines of it are distinguishable, rising towards a life that is more ardent, more complex, more vigorous, more spiritual.

Materially (Maeterlinck writes) he has the disposal of infinite resources, he knows the secret of prodigious forces of which we are ignorant; but, intellectually, he seems strictly to occupy our sphere; hitherto we have not proved that he has overstepped his limits, and, if he does not come to seek anything beyond, is that not to say that there is nothing beyond this sphere? Is that not to say that the methods of the human spirit are the only possible methods, that man is not mistaken, that he is neither an exception nor a monster, but the being through whom the great will, the great desires of the universe pass, and in whom they manifest themselves the most intensely?[2]

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[1] *Le Temple Enseveli*, p. 157.

[2] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, p. 99.

It is only if Nature showed herself perfect and infallible, having an intelligence incommensurably superior to ours, that there would be reason for us to be afraid and lose courage. It is no longer an inaccessible God towards whom we strive, but a fraternal power we seek to discover.

It is this strange hidden power in the universe after which we seek, and we feel vaguely that we are nearer its comprehension if we attach a name to it. So man has called it "Divinity," "Providence," "Fatality," "Justice." [1]

So that upon the hermetically sealed vases of our conception of the universe we may not invariably inscribe the word "Unknown" —an inscription which discourages us and strikes us into silence; we grave upon them, according to their shape and size, the words "Nature," "Life," "Death," "Infinite," "Selection," "Genius of the Species," and many other names, as those who preceded us graved the names of "God," "Providence," "Destiny," "Reward," etc. It is so if you will, and nothing more. But if the context remain obscure to us, at least we have gained this, that the inscriptions being less threatening, we can approach the vases, touch them, and lay our ear against them, with a salutary curiosity.[2]

In the picturesque and imaginative religions of the early world every force of Nature was a god; animate Nature was filled with separate divinities. As the old order gave place to the newer these gods became fewer, and with the increasing tendency to diminish the number of gods worshipped man realised more and more that these were not separate deities, but varying expressions of some Divine power. For centuries the most progres-

[1] *Le Temple Enseveli*, p. 145. [2] *La Vie des Abeilles*, p. 200.

sive part of mankind has considered that it has reached its loftiest possible cult in the worship of one God, to whom not only man and Nature, not only this world, but the universe, past, present, and future, belongs. To this wonderful and beautiful monotheism this part of mankind has clung for ages.

But just as the many gods of ancient times have gradually become one in the thought of more modern days, so does the aspect of that one tend to waver and change, and, it may be, wholly to disappear from the worship of man. Man seeks truth above all, and he seeks it courageously; although he cling emotionally to the God his fathers have worshipped, yet intellectually he is willing to recognise that truth is setting up a different image for his conception.

Maeterlinck lauds the goodwill of man, who is ready, if truth point that way, to renounce all that he had considered his specific rights, his hopes of happiness, as he has already renounced in great part his personal expectation of a future life.[1]

As man looks round him at the forces with which, and against which, he seems to strive, it is increasingly borne in upon him that the final power resides, not in things external but in himself. Let him, therefore, conserve the strength to continue the struggle and accomplish his essential mission, which is to live with all the ardour of which he is capable, as if his life were more

[1] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, p. 181.

important than any other for the destiny of humanity.

> That [attitude], too, is more conformable with the vast law which brings back to ourselves, one by one, all the gods with which we had filled the world. Most of these gods were only effects whose causes were to be found in ourselves. According as we advance, we discover that many forces which dominated us and amazed us are only ill-understood portions of our own power, and it is probable that that will be more and more confirmed day by day.[1]

Here, again, we find Maeterlinck insisting that the force by which man is to conquer in the end must come from an internal, not an external, source. Nature seems to work independent of man ; it is for man to judge and reconcile the facts he sees. What was formerly called "the gods," Maeterlinck tells us, is to-day called "life."[2] The transference of epithet brings with it greater freedom, scope, and dignity for man and his life on this planet.[3] What has been taken from the heavens has been found again in the heart of man—nothing has been lost. The once predominating importance of death exists no longer. But what has gone from death is found in life, and mankind has gained infinitely by the change.[4]

Yet man is still far from having solved the great riddle of the universe.

Besides the fraternal aspect that Nature sometimes seems to have there is the other aspect, harsh and terrible—the aspect that makes man (it may be because of his still limited, though ever-

[1] *Le Temple Enseveli*, pp. 279–80.
[2] Ibid. p. 27.
[3] Ibid. p. 30.
[4] Ibid. p. 156.

widening, knowledge of her) declare that there is no justice to be found in her. Her processes seem cruel and crushing, in great and small things alike. Man seeks in vain for any sort of ordered perfection that would prove such a moral being as he could both worship and understand (at least, in part)—if the two are ever compatible! On what can he depend? On his judgment, his reason, his intellect? But he is baffled at every turn. The age is now past for recommending blind belief in a God who means well by man, but who refuses to encourage him to use his intellect (the most divine thing about him) in search of him. For the intelligent human being no faith of the heart will last long without concurrence of the head. Religionists have supposed a God who is angry because man does not worship him properly, according to the way in which he would wish to be worshipped. Is not this the very thing man is seeking to do? All searchers after truth—and these are more numerous every day—would fain know, above all else, what is this ruling World-Spirit, how we should regard it, how approach it. Can one, then, conceive of a God, supreme in reason, who refuses to aid man in his search for him, and yet is angry because he finds him not? Younger ages—except those who remain "faithless towards God but faithful to his shadow"—will cast aside that notion of a deity.

What idea has been more faithfully sought, among all ages and conditions of mankind, than that of God? Is the perfection of it not the hope

of strict religionist and broad-minded philosopher alike? Have the best intellects in the world not been spent in search of it? And yet one of the most progressive and enlightened of our philosophers can write, "S'il est un Dieu!" [1]

During certain enlightened and spiritual ages man has felt nearer to the goal of his search; he has dimly perceived his God and hoped that the next age would see him more clearly. But in the law of action and reaction the next age has made strides towards knowledge from some different direction, and the ultimate revelation of the universal Spirit has appeared almost as far away as ever. So it may be, too, with the individual seekers after Truth. Maeterlinck, in the enthusiasm of an approach, declares that, if we would, we could hear every word that the divine Spirit spoke. It is with man the fault lies—man, who has not developed his spiritual faculty sufficiently to understand the message of the universe, even of his own particular world.

Elsewhere the same writer breaks out into a declamation against the attitude that the Churches have forced upon man. He struggles against their dictum that religion is necessary for morality—nay, is the beginning of it. Religions give man little help in the discovery on which his life is staked: the discovery of the world's spiritual motive force.

Why does this God, Maeterlinck writes, more perfect than man, ask of us what a perfect man would not ask? Why does he

[1] *Sagesse et Destinée*, p. 165.

make of a faith that is too voluntary, almost blindly accepted, so to speak, the only and most necessary of virtues? If he is irritated that we do not understand him, that we disobey him, would it not be just that he should manifest himself so that human reason, which he himself created, with its admirable exigencies, should not be obliged to renounce the most precious, the most indispensable, of its privileges in order to approach his throne? Now, has this indication been like so many others, clear and significant enough to force human reason to kneel before him? Yet, if he loves to be worshipped, as those who speak in his name loudly proclaim, it would be easy for him to constrain us all to worship none but him. We only wait for some undeniable sign. In the name of this direct reflection of his light that he has placed in the loftiest region of our being, in which there burns with a fire and purity growing daily more beautiful the only passion for absolute certainty and truth, does it not seem that we have a right to expect it?[1]

Our sense of the unknown, the mysterious, the spiritual requires to be called constantly into play in order not to be atrophied. The idea that we make for ourselves of the enigma of the universe is the only thing that is capable of giving exercise to all our intellectual and spiritual faculties. There is a more active life in this direction at the present day than there has ever been. Man seems gradually, very gradually, coming into line with the universal plan, his idea of which he is reconstructing for himself with the putting on of knowledge and the shedding of superstition.

Idea of Immortality.

In the end of the volume called *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, and later in *La Mort*, Maeterlinck dis-

[1] *Le Double Jardin*, pp. 149–50.

cusses the question of Immortality and the views that have been held on the subject.

He argues in turn from four hypotheses (the last two being branches of the same).

First, there is the suggested possibility of complete annihilation after this life. Can we entertain that for a moment? No. Like all that exists, we are imperishable; we cannot conceive of anything being lost in the universe. The wise economy of Nature as regards the law of the imperishability of matter cannot fail where spirit, that is greater than matter, is concerned. If it were so, this brain-power of ours would have nothing in common with the universe which it seeks to conceive. What seems to perish, or at least to disappear and be succeeded by something else, is the form and mode under which we perceive imperishable matter, but we know not what realities correspond to these appearances. We may be sure, however, that we continue to exist in some form, and it concerns us deeply to know what that form will be.

Second, man's ego is different from either his body or his spirit, taken separately; it has bonds with both, and cannot be entirely dissociated from either. Part of the vital essence of this ego is memory. Without memory the continuity is broken, and, lacking continuity, there is no ego. The man who loses his memory of his own ego is practically another man; his acts have no connection with his past life; he might almost as well not have existed. Man clings, then, to his personality, to

the continuity of his ego as he knows it. It is with this desire that he has built up hopes of a personal immortality. Here it is, too, that the religions of the world have erected their stronghold; they have recognised man's desire and have provided for it, promising to their believers that they should have eternal life; that their spiritual personality should live on after its separation from the body; and some have even promised that the body itself should be reconstructed after decay and dissolution. This last, however, is not a sufficiently universal belief for the writer to stay long upon it.

But the continuance of the ego, that essence drawn from physical and mental and spiritual, is promised with great assurance in the Christian religion, to take an illustrious example.

With what truth?

As the physical body grows older the faculties begin to decay, and with the decay of the bodily powers the mental and spiritual faculties begin to decline also. Notably, *memory* goes. Why, then, should not the ego go too? Why should we insist upon trying to retain it? Is it not more reasonable to suppose that it goes with the body, to which it is intimately allied, since the memory, on which it depends vitally, suffers with bodily decay and senility? We make a bold claim for its continuance; we, who know so little of the causes of this life, how can we expect, from our present point of knowledge, which (to use a Stevensonianism) "it would be more descriptive to call ignorance"—how can we expect to understand the next world?

We can no more imagine it than a man born blind can imagine the sunlight and the flowers.

To seek to carry into the next world our ego of this world is to resemble the cripple who insists, even though cured, upon dragging with him his crutches, because life would be too different without the old disabilities, and part of his identity would be lost. Our ego in this world is our mortal limitation; why seek to perpetuate that very thing and make it immortal? It is but the disease of mortality. And yet it seems to most men that, if their existence became "a drop of ignorance in the ocean of the unknown," [1] all that followed would concern them no longer. How strange it is to cling so tenaciously for after-life to that ego which we lose so frequently in this life, without troubling ourselves much about the fact! In sleep, for instance, the continuity of the ego is nightly broken; any chance shock or accident may temporarily endanger it, or wholly shatter it. Of all possible destinies, says Maeterlinck, the continuance of this ego into the next life would be the only one to be really dreaded; complete annihilation were a thousand times to be preferred.

There remains, after we have disposed of these two hypotheses, *third*, the conception of an immortality without consciousness, or, *fourth*, with a consciousness so enlarged and transformed that that which we possess to-day can have no conception of it, just as our eye cannot imagine any other light than that which ranges from red to violet.

[1] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, p. 283.

As to what psychical research societies claim to have proved with regard to the continuance of the ego in after-life, shown by the appearance of the spirit of the departed (always in bodily form), these revisitations of the earth prove nothing for or against the theory. The spectre appears, in general, very shortly after the death of its bodily possessor, and makes only trivial manifestations of existence, always connected with the life just left; it shows no sign of having entered on a newer, broader after-life. A little later, when the real after-life might fairly have claimed the spirit, it evaporates and disappears for ever.

A future without consciousness of this life, some would say, is equivalent to annihilation. This introduces the problem that has troubled the metaphysicians of all ages: to conceive of an after-life without the consciousness of this life, to conceive it by means of that very consciousness which the theory annihilates. We have existed somewhere in the past, but of that life we have no consciousness now; why, Maeterlinck argues, should we expect that, in passing on to the next life—a wider, finer, and nobler than this, as we hope—we should be burdened with the consciousness of this life?

Is it not almost certain that there is wanting to us now, among many other senses, a sense superior to that of our mnemonic consciousness, a sense atrophied for want of use, or still merely a germ? Is it not possible that our æsthetic pleasures, which are of no practical utility, are the pale reflection of a different consciousness filtering through our

mnemonic consciousness? Are there not senses which come with the varying stages of the development of man, which suggest to us that more are yet in store for us in the next stage of existence, of which we have hardly a glimmer here? Whether our spirit is to be swallowed up in the great Spirit, and "the dewdrop slips into the shining sea," or whether our individual spirits remain separate spiritual entities with a consciousness enlarged and intensified in a way of which we can, while here, have no slightest conception, man has not yet proved. The latter seems the more probable, and that possibility admitted, it will remain for future thinkers to imagine the modes and forms of such an existence.

We have no right to deny the existence of what we cannot imagine; each succeeding stage of human development, individual and racial, goes to prove this truth. We are much more likely to reach the truth by trying to imagine the (as yet) unimaginable, than by allowing ourselves to remain chained by the dreams of this passing world.

In *La Mort* Maeterlinck carries on the subject started in *L'Immortalité*. The continuity of the ego, he asserts, implies limits; it can only subsist as an ego in separation from what surrounds it, and the stronger the ego the clearer is the separation. This separation would be a torture to the mind, for the mind no sooner sees limits than it desires to overstep them, and the greater the perfection of mind, the greater would be the torture. From this point of view, then, we should judge

that the human spirit, as a separate ego, ceases to exist after the death of the body, since it cannot exist in infinite torture.

But, on the other hand, it is argued, the survival of a mere particle of self would provide the nucleus of a new ego for the next life. Unfortunately, it is not suggested whether memory is to be a factor in this new composition, nor of what the " particle " is composed. This particle would grow as the ego did in this life. What happens in this world may be taken as a figure of what may happen in the next, with the difference that sorrow and pain can no longer affect us, since they imply the finite.

The only possible sorrow of sheer mind is the want of knowledge or understanding, and the consequent sense of powerlessness. The suffering caused by the sight of the pain and misery in the world the spirit has left would only exist if the spirit did not understand, and it would only be intolerable if the spirit were without hope. To be itself without hope, the universe would have to give up all effort to understand itself ; and to have hope itself, and permit the eternal existence of a spirit without hope, would be to have in itself an object ever foreign to itself.

From all this, Maeterlinck concludes, either mind will not perceive its limits, and therefore not suffer from them, or it will overstep them as soon as it perceives them.

But can the first conclusion be allowed? If mind does not perceive its limits, this implies a state of imperfection, and hence, by Maeterlinck's own

reasoning, a condition of finiteness, and is therefore not allowable in infinity.

In the piece that follows Maeterlinck, trying, with his characteristic honesty, to see both sides of the question, confuses the issue, and arrives at no definite conclusion. In one chapter he appears to consider speculation upon the infinite tempting to the intelligence, but useless; in the next he boldly declares it is *not* vain. Since our comprehension of things is finite, he decides, as other thinkers have done, that the idea of infinity, when we try to think it out, seems full of contradictions. Then comes the question, Are we to have the future our intelligence suggests, that of mingling with infinity, or that suggested by the senses—a continuance of our ego under vastly different conditions? Maeterlinck answers that it is probable that we shall all ultimately be merged in infinity, but he seems to give a choice of infinities; for the satisfaction of the intelligence he suggests an infinity that has already attained perfection; for that of the senses, the infinity that seeks itself, is still evolving, and not yet established. And possibly the second will merge into the first. He practically confesses himself baffled before this purely speculative problem, and we find him saying:—

Tout ce qui nous est accordé dans notre minuscule enceinte, c'est de nous y évertuer vers ce qui nous paraît être le mieux et d'y demeurer héroïquement convaincus que rien de ce que nous y faisons ne s'y peut perdre.[1]

[1] Cit. *La Mort*, pp. 243–4.

At any rate, whatever happens, of this we may be sure, Maeterlinck asserts, that there is no possibility of unhappiness in the life that succeeds and completes this.

Si donc nous devions y souffrir, nos souffrances n'y seraient qu'éphémères, et rien n'importe qui n'est pas éternel.[1]

Everything must finish, exempt from suffering; a universe which wills its own suffering must be mad; under whatever form the human spirit may continue, infinity can be none but an infinity of pure joy.

[1] Cit. *La Mort*, pp. 246–7.

CHAPTER VI

MAETERLINCK'S PHILOSOPHY (*continued*)

ETHICAL, SOCIAL, ÆSTHETIC

Known and unknown—Past, present, future.
Luck, chance, accident—Important place given to chance.
Instinct *versus* intelligence—Truth and justice.
Perpetual search for both—Sincerity.
External *versus* internal justice—Social theories.
Social injustice in world—Present social conditions.
Universal suffrage—Beauty, simplicity, and silence.
Continued presence of all three—Beauty coupled with truth.
Beauty of commonplace—Wonder and admiration.
Outcome of former—Wonder of early world—Hero-worship.

DOES Maeterlinck intentionally surround his doctrines with a mysterious nebulousness, as has been suggested? Is the charge of wilful obscurity brought against him, as against Browning and Meredith, deserved by any of the three? No. All are unusually honest and sincere in purpose, though widely different in expression and method.

In spite of the glamour that the mysterious and unknown has for him, we find Maeterlinck asserting that one does not lift oneself into superiority over the rest of mankind by plunging, without preliminary, into the study of the unknown and infinite. It is a shoreless sea to those who have not begun with the study of the known and finite.

With this, with the things that lie to his hand, man must begin, working outward gradually from the known to the unknown, from the finite towards the infinite. So only may he hope to learn somewhat of the great mystery that surrounds him, the world, and the universe.

When one does begin faithfully and loyally with the known and finite, and reaches the region of the vast unknown and infinite—what then? Where is the final explanation to be found? The present age falls back on chance, luck, fatality.[1] The idea of Fate dominated the ancients, as it still dominates the East. The modern idea of fatality has altered, but seems increasingly present in literature; one finds it in Ibsen, in Flaubert, in the Russian novel. It has not the living personality of the ancient Fate; it is something more formless, vague, impersonal. Nor do we in modern times pretend that we have in our "fatality" discovered something startlingly new; it is only a provisional appellation, a *pis aller*. It is not to be read into everything, nor should it encourage nonchalance in seeking to find the reason of things that are really explicable. Let it merely remain a *name* for the inexplicable, *en attendant mieux*.[2]

To become master of the whole of life, man must perpetually send emissaries in every direction; he must not shut himself up in the kingdom of the present, but eagerly seek news from every quarter. The past and the future are in his power as well as the present. We are apt to say that we

[1] *Le Temple Enseveli*, pp. 125–6. [2] Ibid. pp. 164–6.

bear the weight of the past; that is a mistake, it is the past that bears our weight.[1] We talk sadly of the irrevocable and irreparable past, but the past is just as we choose it shall be. What is important to us in the past is the moral character that events have made and are making, and not the events themselves. We can dominate the past: it only acts on us in as far as we cease to act on it. The unchangeability of the past can only be affirmed by those in whom moral life has ceased. Let us not envy another's past; only our own suits us; there is no past that is poor and empty, only one that is poorly and meanly accepted.

The future, too, is ours, and would be ours still more if we only knew how to understand it. It is a curious physical want that we do not know the future as we do the past.[2] It must already exist somewhere; if not, we are merely witnesses who await events. It is as absurd to affirm of Time as it would be of Space, that nothing in it really existed until man was present. No traveller would think of asserting that no place was real till he reached it. Similarly, we should not make such an assertion of events in Time. Our division of Time into Past, Present, and Future is an arbitrary one; in itself it is probable that Time should be regarded as an immense Present.

The venerable science of reading the Future, which in bygone days was the business of the prophet, priest, or seer of the tribe, has now taken

[1] *Le Temple Enseveli*: "Le Passé," pp. 202, 224.

[2] Ibid. pp. 285–308, "L'Avenir," also *L'Oiseau Bleu*.

refuge in obscure and vulgar corners, but it has not ceased to exist. The fact that it has been vulgarised by shams and charlatans has caused it to be looked upon with scorn by the seriously minded. But although it is foolish to admit blindly what seems a miracle, it is still more foolish to laugh at it blindly. There are still more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy.

We stand with regard to the future as to a past that we have forgotten: we must try to remember the road to it. It has often been said that the effect of knowing the future would be to change it, as men would seek to avoid an impending catastrophe or alter a troublous event which the future held for them. Maeterlinck insists that the effect of knowing the future would not be to alter things that were to happen, but that if events were foreknown, men would know better how to face them. And the mysteries of the future would not lie bare before every eye any more than do those of the past and present. As it is only a few who have the courage to seek and really to know the past and present, so would it be with the future.

Luck—Chance—Accident.

Having called the world-enigma "Fatality," Maeterlinck does not surprise us by the dominant place he gives in life to chance. He tells us that the question of chance is one of the great questions

of life. *Le Temple Enseveli* is filled with two notions—the notion of justice and the notion of chance. Chance is for us still part of the inexplicable enigma—to be accepted, till we know more.

The gods, to whom religions have taught men to look, cannot explain the actions of chance till they themselves have been explained: the one requires as much explanation as the other.[1] That chance is not cruel we see in examining accidents, from the fact that, in most cases (with some notable exceptions), fewer people are present than might have been the case if they had followed out their original plans. For instance, suppose a shipwreck, or train accident—many an one who might have been on board is not there. It may be that chance has spoken to them in the form of a presentiment, or, less consciously, in the form of a change of desire. It may be that some are detained by illness or by some trifling external cause, and are all the time fuming and fretting against it. In all these cases, Maeterlinck suggests, the subconscious element in man, in touch with chance, warns him, in a dim, little-understood fashion, that the journey, the voyage, must not be taken, and so saves him.

But, in the last case, we should be inclined to argue, the subconscious element in man declares against chance, and is all the time desirous of driving man on to his fate. If he is detained by purely external agencies, is he not rather detained and saved *against* his will and against that sub-

[1] *Le Temple Enseveli*, p. 254.

conscious force which Maeterlinck insists acts largely as guide to man in questions of physical danger?

What Maeterlinck calls the "inconscient" (and we have translated as "subconscious" in preceding passages) he sometimes makes almost synonymous with "instinct." It is largely the same faculty that is spoken of in "La Chance" [1] as "inconscient" and in "L'Accident" [2] as "instinct." It would seem as if Maeterlinck accorded to this faculty a certain amount of spiritual perception—such perception as is required to be able to look into and understand the future. In "L'Accident" we find instinct outrunning intelligence in averting danger, and in "L'Avenir" [3] we are told that in experimental thought-reading instinct makes itself more heard than the most determined will. Instinct, so understood, is evidently closely connected with the vital principle of human nature and indispensable to its continuance.

But if this is instinct, is it not rather unfortunate to have selected the same word for the unreasoning faculty of the lower animals: one of the points, indeed, that serve to distinguish them in general from man? If the faculty is the same, we must in many points rank the brute creation higher than ourselves. Is it not the faculty of "intuition," rather than "instinct," that is meant in Maeterlinck's "instinct"? That would answer better to the idea of the "inconscient" also, which,

[1] *Le Temple Enseveli.* [2] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs.*
[3] *Le Temple Enseveli.*

taken at its full value, seems to be a spiritual, subconscious ego.

In " La Chance " Maeterlinck gives the ideas of a friend on the subject of *l'inconscient,* and appears, in general, to approve them. But when he tells us that misfortune is contagious between two " inconscients," we see that he does not go so far on these lines as his friend, who deliberately tries to mingle the good luck likely to result from an awakened and lively " inconscient " with the bad luck resulting from a more slumbering " inconscient," and hopes to make the former dominate the latter.

This spiritual, subconscious ego, when awakened, can be both guide and protection to man. But there are three great injustices against which it struggles in vain—lifelong poverty, physical and mental deformity, for these strike man before his birth, and all that his " inconscient " can then do for him is to help him to make the best of them.

Apart from these disabilities, this inner power, this " force inconsciente," is for us most important. It is the force at the very centre of our being. It has a sort of spiritual relation with the spiritual forces of the world, and the more we know it the more we can dominate chance.

In " Le Temple du Hasard," a curious little essay in *Le Double Jardin* on the subject of Monte Carlo, Maeterlinck pictures out a real and imaginary God of Chance enthroned, surrounded by his satellites. Here again we find that same note of belief in chance and luck that is found

earlier in *Le Temple Enseveli*. Chance is here described as "the most obscure god of our earth." [1] And later Maeterlinck writes :—

> A grave, mysterious divinity, a sovereign force that is wise, harmonious, and sure, reigns there. He should have been placed in a palace of marble, unadorned and severe, simple and colossal, lofty and vast, glacial and religious, geometrical and inflexible, assertive and overwhelming.

Love of Truth and Justice.

In the essay on "La Justice" Maeterlinck writes :—

> Let us confine ourselves, therefore, to the assertion of the admirable love of justice and truth that is in the heart of man, . . . this passion that is the sign of humanity *par excellence*.[2]

It is the duty of man, he declares, time after time, to seek truth in all things; and if there should seem to be a higher and a lower truth his duty is to cling to the higher, as the truer. Whatever courage it may require to follow after the truest, that courage must be gained. However discouraging a truth may seem, it transforms the courage of those who know how to accept it; and in any case a discouraging truth, from the sheer fact that it is truth, is always far better than an encouraging lie. In science, in philosophy, in art, in literature, as well as in the daily round of life, the only beautiful is the true.[3]

[1] *Le Double Jardin:* "Le Temple du Hasard," p. 33.
[2] *Le Temple Enseveli*, p. 61.
[3] *Sagesse et Destinée*, pp. 189–90.

At a certain age, Maeterlinck says, one enjoys better saying things which are genuinely true than things which are less true and more striking. If truth should appear less great and interesting to us than what is not true, it is because our intelligence does not understand truth and it needs to be enlarged and purified. If an apparent truth raises us to a height, we may safely await the real truth at that height, for nothing is higher than truth read aright. Happy are the eyes that have no need of illusion to see that the spectacle is great! It is often the poet's eye that reads most quickly the real meaning of the truth, that hangs, like beauty, in a vast canopy above us. Life itself has never appeared greater, nor of more importance, than to-day—that is, because it is nearer the truth.

We are in a world, Maeterlinck writes, in which truth reigns at the heart of things, and it is not truth, but a lie, that needs to be explained.[1]

Here we see the innate optimism of an idea that would have saved pessimistic Christians of the type of Bunyan years of misery.

Illusions may have given us a little deceptive peace, but when they are past we must come face to face once more with truth. The discovery of the same truth will make men act very differently; it will make little alteration in the life of the one, while it will completely overthrow all the habits

[1] *Le Trésor des Humbles*, p. 246.

and aims of the other. It is the latter only who has really understood;

> for we can only flatter ourselves that we have understood a truth when it is impossible not to make our whole life conform to it.[1]

All this starts the old question, How are we to understand truth when we see it? Maeterlinck answers that there are as many ways of understanding a truth as there are minds that think they understand it.[2] Also he tells us that, if it is uncertain whether the truth we are about to tell be understood, then we should be silent rather than allow it to be misunderstood and regarded as a lie.[3]

In *Monna Vanna* the suggestive question is raised: If what is truth for one is a lie to another, how is truth to be established between the two?

One thing, at least, is clear, in our age-long search for truth: that the beginning of the comprehension of truth will be in absolute personal sincerity, and that not only a sincerity towards men and things outside oneself, but a great and intense honesty in one's own soul, that exists, not because of policy or utility but simply because it must, because man's nature is at heart loyal and sincere and just, but unfortunately, by artificial training, has been choked into theories of expediency. In the essay on Sincerity[4] Maeterlinck tells us that even sincerity is relative, as it is only able to manifest itself within the bounds of our ego,

[1] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*: "L'Inquiétude de notre Morale," p. 175.
[2] Ibid. p. 174. [3] *Le Double Jardin*, p. 235. [4] Ibid. pp. 231–43.

and its limits alter daily.[1] The act or thought that appears in certain colours to-day may to-morrow be shown in quite different colours, and the act that to-day we do not think of confessing may to-morrow be the subject of a more serious and eager confession than any hitherto made.

Maeterlinck is afraid of provincialism in thought —afraid lest men should not be ready to travel to the uttermost end. He warns us against thinking that our little circle of truth is the whole truth, and insists that men should not give themselves up to the special truth of the century in which they live. If their age be scientific or philosophical, let them, by all means, become saturated with scientific or philosophical truth, but let them beware of believing that this is truth in its entirety, let them always keep an open ear for the voice of truth that speaks in a hundred different ways.

In history, our author asserts, truth lies less in reason, which is turned towards the past, than in imagination, which is turned towards the future.

His own eyes turn constantly to the future: for him it is almost part of the present, far enough away to rouse the sense of striving in man, and yet near enough not to let hope wane. But the man who strives does not seek to be judged at some higher tribunal: if his conscience acquit him of slackness and injustice, with their attendant evils, he does not need an external judgment. Is it finer, the writer queries, to believe in a just, omni-

[1] "Conscience," p. 243.

present judge, or in an indwelling spirit of justice in humanity? In spite of the many injustices of man to man, Maeterlinck decides for the latter.

Many men find it much more difficult to be always loyal and just than to be occasionally heroic—many natures that can stand a violent, temporary strain cannot stand a constant, wearing one. The very fact that man is now realising by degrees that the whole social system is built up on an injustice shows that the inner sense of justice must be strong, to work its way out. Also the fact that man has tried to justify his injustice. To what end? That he might live in an atmosphere of justice, which he needs.

This desire for justice shows itself in the dramas as well as in the prose works. Justice forms the theme of the last scene of *Monna Vanna*, and Joyzelle calls out, in her blind search for it :—

> There are other forces, there are other voices, and I am all alone against all that speaks in this uncertain darkness. . . . Justice, where are you? . . . Justice, what must I do?[1]

"L'Éloge de l'Épée" turns also largely on justice, as necessary to man as the breath of life. In the realm of practical ethics the subject naturally occurs frequently in Maeterlinck's various philosophical works. His most concise expression of it is to be found in the essay entitled "Le Suffrage Universel" (in *Le Double Jardin*) and "Notre Devoir Social" (in *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*).

[1] *Joyzelle*, p. 161.

In the former essay we are told that absolute altruism and anarchy are to be preferred to absolute egoism and to the most carefully and irreproachably organised government imaginable, because the first are the extreme forms which require the most perfect human beings. Human nature tends to go to its extreme length ; at present it is aiming (in spite of many obstacles and reactions) at those forms which show ultimate perfection. To this end liberty is necessary, with all the responsibility that liberty entails. These will be abused time and again, as in the past, but one only learns by experiment how to make use of freedom, and freedom alone can bring about any forward development. The nations of the world have tried in turn every form of government ; all have passed, or are passing, through the same phases, tending towards government by universal suffrage. Whether that will be the finale none can say, no nation having as yet attained that stage. We may, in time, go beyond it, to come back in a cycle to autocracy, then plutocracy, and so on. At present it is an ideal, to attain which the people may pass by or neglect something really higher and finer. But the mass, like the individual, argues Maeterlinck, has a human right to realise its instinctive ideals, and learn from them what their attainment may teach.

" Notre Devoir Social " begins with the statement of the truth of the first principle of socialism : the duty of those who have of despoiling themselves for those who have not. Maeterlinck con-

tends that that is a duty that has never been entirely fulfilled, even in the times of the early Christian Church, or among other religious orders that have held poverty a sacred command. Therefore, he argues, when we consider any other social duty, we must frankly confess that it is subsidiary, and that we are knowingly evading the first and greatest. Maeterlinck attempts to give no justification for this evasion; he does not even seek to give explanation or excuse. Is it because he finds it too difficult? Or does he feel there is none of any worth? He is generally outspoken and courageous in facing thought; but most of us, like him, when it comes to action on social questions, complain that individual acts cannot greatly help to solve the problem, and we look round for some one else to start a general movement.

Maeterlinck, however, is honester than most in frankly admitting the neglected primary duty. He does not discuss *all* the objections to equalising man with man; he selects four as being the only objections that can be seriously defended.

First, then, it is said that inequality is inevitable and conformable to the laws of Nature. To this Maeterlinck replies that the human race appears to be created to surmount certain laws of Nature, otherwise its very existence would be in peril. The old, the sick, the feeble would run the risk of perishing at the hands of the strong.

The second objection is that, in order to hasten the triumph of justice, the best should not pre-

maturely despoil themselves of their arms, the most efficacious of which are riches and leisure. Maeterlinck lets this objection pass, on the understanding that the necessity for sacrifice is admitted, and only the opportunity for making it is awaited.

The third argument in favour of keeping things as they are is that, as it is man's first duty to avoid violence and the effusion of blood, the social evolution must not be too swift; the masses must be brought gradually towards liberty and greater plenty. To this Maeterlinck replies that it is questionable whether the slow torments of the poorer classes at present are a greater evil, on the whole, than would be the short, sharp sufferings of the privileged classes in the event of a violent revolution.

The final, and, according to Maeterlinck, the most disturbing, argument is that humanity has, for more than a century, been passing through the most fertile and triumphant period of its existence, and seems now in the decisive phase of its evolution. It may be there is now only one veil to rend before mankind is face to face with the greatest mysteries. A violent revolution might disturb the present equipoise and send man reeling back from the approach to the great mystery: those whose hands might have drawn aside the veil would be crushed in the dust, and the whole upward struggle would have to begin over again.

To this objection, too, Maeterlinck has his answer

ready. Too much importance is attached, he asserts, to a somewhat uncertain danger. Besides, there would be vast compensations for the short interruption to human progress. Although it is true that the inspiration of the genius of the species is as capricious as that of the individual, and might be long in coming again, yet who knows what might happen if every human unit had the opportunity of exerting his or her brain-power to the fullest? In the present condition of things there is a monstrous waste of spiritual and intellectual faculty. If the whole energies of humanity were exerted together towards the conquest of new spiritual forces, mankind would have an infinitely greater chance of arriving swiftly at its goal.

Without going even so far as Maeterlinck's answer takes us, let us look at the argument he is combating. How are we to reconcile the statement that "humanity seems, considering the past, to be in the decisive phase of its evolution," that "one would believe, from certain indications, that it was on the point of attaining its apogee," with the position from which we started—viz. that the present social conditions were so bad that it was the first duty of those who had, to despoil themselves for those who had not, and yet that no one fulfilled that duty? Could the zenith be so near attainment without some more general spread of the idea of human responsibility and of the other spiritual forces than there is at present?

After dismissing these four objections, Maeterlinck continues to argue, balancing both sides care-

fully, in favour of speedy progress. There are always many, he says, who cling to the past and its ways; do not let us be afraid to pull too hard in the other direction. Never let us fear that we may go too quickly; the instinct of the species will guide and prevent us from overbalancing humanity. Let us always hope and love, as if the race with which we had to do were ideal. We must not stay our hand from the destruction of the past through fear of what we are to put in its place: the force of things and of life will take charge of the reconstruction, and that speedily. What a comforting doctrine for iconoclasts and revolutionaries! One only wonders that Maeterlinck did not make use of it earlier in answer, say, to the third or fourth objections. It is a dangerous theory to work unconditionally: it can be made to fit any barbarity, any philistinism, any destruction and massacre that is dictated, from the social point of view, by the mass rather than by the individual.

In the last sentence of this characteristic essay we find the key to Maeterlinck's position with regard to this point. It is the instinct of the species, he tells us, that decides these things; its destiny it is that speaks; and if this instinct or destiny is mistaken it is not for us to intervene, for all external control is at an end. We are at the limit and height of ourselves; and higher, there no longer exists anything that can correct our errors.

Love of Beauty, Simplicity, Silence.

In his sheer love of beauty, of exterior perfection of form, colour, perfume, interior nobility of content, thought, ideal, Maeterlinck has few rivals in modern times. In his works we constantly find expressions of delight in every kind of beauty, physical, mental, moral; for him there is no joy in life without it. In *Le Temple Enseveli* we find a characteristic passage:—

> Which of us who has this sentiment of beauty, if a magician could suddenly deprive him of it, without leaving the least trace of it behind, not even the hope that it might come back—which of us would not prefer to lose riches, peace of mind, or even health, and many years of life, rather than this invisible and almost indefinable faculty? [1]

In the exquisite, haunted fairyland of Maeterlinck's plays beauty reigns predominant, sometimes a strange, wild, weird loveliness giving place to the fantastic or the grotesque, in order to secure a more striking beauty through vividness of contrast.

The beauty of Nature is ever present in Maeterlinck, both in external revelations to man and in her secret workings, to which man is daily opening up the way. No Greek of the ancient times of sculptured perfection worshipped more truly at the shrine of beauty than this modern æsthetic.

We have noticed his doctrine of the human soul "greedy for beauty," which is its only food. The

[1] *Le Temple Enseveli*, p. 173: "Règne de la Matière."

capacity of the human soul for beauty is equal to its capacity for development—that is, it is infinite with the infinity of the soul. The striving towards perfection, externally and internally, tends always to bring it a step nearer to the perfection it seeks.

Frequently in Maeterlinck we find beauty coupled with truth: the loftiest ascetic makes the two dwell together in Maeterlinck's pages. Here, as elsewhere, he joins hands with the noblest philosophy of all ages. But one note he sounds that is typically modern and characteristic of the Flemish strain in him: the most intense love of absolute simplicity, exterior and interior, in person and habit and thought. In "La Vie Profonde" he speaks of "Simplicity, that is the favourite slave of God."[1] The simplest things are the finest; the simplest thoughts are the loftiest; the simplest acts are the most beautiful; the simplest words are the most expressive, and frequently no words at all are best. Maeterlinck's love of simplicity must be coupled with his love of silence.

He would have art follow out this simplicity also. In "Le Tragique Quotidien" he says (in speaking of the tendency to paint pictures of stirring and warlike scenes) that in the new epoch the artist will rather

represent a house buried in the country—a door open at the end of a corridor, a face or hands at rest, and these simple pictures

[1] *Le Trésor des Humbles*, p. 248.

will have the power of adding something to our consciousness of life; and that is a possession impossible to lose again.[1]

Maeterlinck does not add, as he might have done, that for this genre infinitely more imagination is required on the part of the spectator, and that that is also an invaluable possession.

He blames those who demand the unusual and extravagant in life, saying that that indicates a poorness of spirit. He demands why we should expect the heavens to open with the crash of a thunderbolt, in order to reveal God to man? It is to the stillness that one must listen, to the simple, quiet, usual, everyday things, and he who does not find God in them finds him nowhere. Many thinkers and non-thinkers will be in agreement with Maeterlinck there, but how many will follow him in such an utterance as this?—

The hero needs the approbation of the ordinary man, but the ordinary man does not ask for the approbation of the hero, and pursues his life quietly, as one who has his treasure laid up safely.[2]

This reduces heroism at a bound to a desire for notoriety. The hero, if he be in any true sense a hero, has the simplest of hearts and no more requires approbation for a heroic deed than the fly does for walking on the ceiling. The act is the simple, natural outcome of his life and habit.

Which of us can join issue with him in the declaration of the superiority of the silence of the child to the speech of Marcus Aurelius?[3] Is there to

[1] *Le Trésor des Humbles*, p. 165. [2] Ibid. "Emerson," p. 135.
[3] Ibid. p. 143.

be no difference between the silence that is born of knowledge and that which is born of ignorance? Are we not to distinguish between the simplicity of a marvellously constructed machine and the simplicity of a bar of iron as yet unworked: between the soul that has learned, through complex experience, that simplicity is best and the soul that has as yet learned nothing in this world?

The beauty of silence to a beautiful soul has carried Maeterlinck too far: he worships the ordinary at the expense of the ideal. There are some souls that have nothing with which to be silent, whose silence therefore is infinitely less beautiful than the eloquence of the beautiful soul that speaks. Were we to carry Maeterlinck's doctrine to its logical conclusion, we should consider inarticulateness a virtue, and stand transfixed with admiration before the silence of the ignorant, unlettered peasant, thinking it far finer than the eloquence of a Cicero. The peasant does not know how to use his silence; to him it is not divine. He has no mental store to feed his perceptions; external impressions convey little to his mind: the mechanism is not at work which should transmute the leaden metal into gold. It is strange that Maeterlinck, so subjective a philosopher, should not have given more widely different values to the silences of the richly stored and that of the poor and barren mind.

His view contrasts with that of Goethe in his *Tasso*:—

> Es bildet ein Talent sich in der Stille,
> Sich ein Charakter in dem Strom der Welt.

Maeterlinck holds that it is in silence and simplicity that a man possesses his own soul most thoroughly. The man who strives to leave the natural, ordinary round of life is not, by doing so, approaching any closer to the ideal; indeed, he is leaving it behind. Like Emerson, Maeterlinck is the philosopher of everyday life, with an even stronger tendency to idealise the commonplace and its function in life.

Without the strain that he puts upon his theory, it is sound; it combats the modern tendency to the extravagant, the *outré*, the complex, the startling, at the expense of the simple and natural. It is the plea of the species against the genius, of socialism (in its broadest sense) against individualism. In the progress and development of the world, Maeterlinck tells us, it is the normal and not the exceptional that will have the last word.[1]

Faculty of Wonder and Admiration.

Closely allied with the love of beauty and what is wellnigh the worship of truth, in Maeterlinck, is his striking faculty of wonder and admiration. The intense longing for beauty, that amounts almost to a passion, opens his eyes to the divine beauty that lies in the universe, both that which exists externally for every eye to read, and that which lies secret, exquisite, hidden within the shell, waiting for the mind that can find it and claim it. To understand the beautiful is to admire; few

[1] *Sagesse et Destinée*, p. 216.

among the moderns possess that sympathetic, childlike quality of admiration and of wonder as Maeterlinck does: its essence is simplicity, and it is its own reward. If we were simpler, Maeterlinck would say, if we had less complicated reasons for admiration or non-admiration, we should find far more to call forth our admiring wonder. In *La Vie des Abeilles* this beautiful, childlike quality is shown throughout, the author perpetually insisting that, although science gives us frequent occasion for explaining what we had before wondered at, yet it is only a transference of the wonder from one manner of Nature's functioning to the other. The discovery of fresh truth does not explain away the reason for wonder, but gives fresh cause for it. Maeterlinck writes:—

> And, let me say in passing, if we took care not to make our admiration subordinate to so many circumstances of place or of origin, we should not so often miss the chance of unclosing our eyes to the wonder of things, and nothing is more beneficial than so to unclose them.[1]

Here Maeterlinck, one of the most advanced thinkers of the twentieth century, reflects the youthful fervour and freshness of the early world. The heir of all the ages in thought, he has kept the æsthetic beauty of the ancient civilisations of the younger days of the earth, which is still the inheritance of the child, a birthright that he barters too soon for the blasé attitude of the modern adolescent.

[1] *La Vie des Abeilles*, p. 64.

Without ever going beyond ourselves, we have occasion for the most intense wonder: what is more marvellous than the fact of animate life on this globe? And inanimate life, the imperishability of matter, the law of gravitation, those laws of Nature that we imagine we understand because we have labelled them, which of us understands the first word of such laws? Above and before all is Man, the centre of the world. We might exclaim with Hamlet: "What a piece of work is Man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty!" Can one exhaust one's wonder at the marvel of the human soul, with its strange, sunrise aspirations, its unearthly longings? Who can say whence it comes, and whither it goes? To exist is to wonder, and to be a source of wonder, and admiration increases with experience. So does our ethical value increase with our power of admiration; this power is one of the most ennobling elements in human culture, one of the prime factors in the education of the soul. Those who cannot wonder and admire are still in the lower scale of being.

It matters little after all (Maeterlinck writes in *Sagesse et Destinée*) whether it be man or the universe that seems to us admirable, provided that something seems admirable to us, and that we raise our consciousness of the infinite. A star that is discovered adds more than one ray to the thoughts, the passions, the courage of man. All the beauty that we see in what surrounds us is already beautiful in our hearts; all that we find great and adorable in ourselves, we find at the same time great and adorable in others.[1]

[1] *Sagesse et Destinée.*

Again, in *Le Temple Enseveli* we find :—

> In the Elysian fields of thought all satisfaction corresponds to a rejuvenation and a development, and nothing is more salutary for the mind than the intoxication and debauch of curiosity, comprehension, and admiration.[1]

To a soul to whom beauty and truth were less magnetic there would be infinitely less reason for wonder and admiration. The frank simplicity of Maeterlinck's mind turned naturally a childlike gaze upon the world. The uplifting power of admiring wonder had its effect, at first unconsciously, then consciously, till we find Maeterlinck deliberately seeking and finding reasons for admiration, where the untutored mind would find nothing but the ordinary and commonplace. This attitude is very evident throughout the *Vie des Abeilles*, induced largely by the wonderful beauty of the scientific principles at the root of natural laws.

Maeterlinck does not dissipate his admiration entirely upon general principles. He has a large reserve for individual souls, whose compelling beauty he has found. Like all enthusiasts, he is a hero-worshipper, and his fervent appreciation of those he has chosen to worship finds vent repeatedly in his works, particularly in *Le Trésor des Humbles*, where are collected the characteristic and enthusiastic Prefaces on Emerson, Novalis, and Ruysbroeck l'Admirable, and other essays containing repeated allusions to Carlyle, to Plotinus, to Marcus Aurelius. In all Maeterlinck's work the thought

[1] *Le Temple Enseveli*, pp. 182–3.

of Shakespeare is not far distant; the references to him are as frequent as those to the Bible.

In the following chapter we shall try to estimate the influence on Maeterlinck of the master-minds he reverences.

CHAPTER VII

THOUGHT THAT HAS INFLUENCED MAETERLINCK

PHILOSOPHICAL, LITERARY, SCIENTIFIC

I. PHILOSOPHICAL.
- *Stoics*—Chiefly Marcus Aurelius.
- *Mystics*—e.g. Ruysbroeck, Novalis, Emerson, Plotinus, Jacob, Boehme, Swedenborg.
- Dynamic human soul—Carlyle.
- Departure from both stoicism and mysticism.
- Nietzsche and his philosophy—Schopenhauer.

II. LITERARY.
- French literature—Balzac and Racine.
- Modern French group: Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Stéphane Mallarmé, Catulle Mendès, etc.
- Effect of English literature—Shakespeare.
- Other Elizabethans, Ford, etc.—Browning, Shelley.
- Influence of Ibsen.
- Russian literature—Tolstoi, etc.
- German literature—Goethe, Romantics, Heyse.

III. SCIENTIFIC.
- English influence—Darwin and Huxley.
- Michelet, Réaumur, Lubbock, etc.
- Special appeal of science.

I. PHILOSOPHICAL

IT is difficult to estimate, especially with regard to a complex and many-sided nature, exactly to what extent another has influenced its development. In the severe simplicity of his outlook and general

attitude to life, Maeterlinck is one with the Stoics, as interpreted by Marcus Aurelius. His work, like his life, has all the dignity of self-control: yet so natural and spontaneous does it seem, that one deems it more temperamental than the result of vigorous self-training. The likelihood is that it is both. Violent and unrestrained passion appears almost foreign to him, even in his plays, although he is very far from following coldly correct, classical models on that account.

In the essays on Fate, Chance, and Destiny there is a strong element of the Stoic, mingled with that curious Eastern sense of fatalism. In the dramas, one would hardly be surprised to see the heroines performing the last devotional, fanatical act of suttee, should the hero chance to die first. Thus in Maeterlinck do East and West seem to meet. In the Preface to the volume containing *La Princesse Maleine, L'Intruse,* and *Les Aveugles* Maeterlinck writes of what one finds in these little dramas :—

> In the heart of them you find the idea of the Christian God, mingled with that of the fatality of ancient days, crushed back into the impenetrable night of Nature, and from there taking pleasure in watching, disconcerting, and darkening the projects, thoughts, and sentiments of man's humble happiness.[1]

Maeterlinck rarely shows the purely speculative metaphysician. *La Mort* shows his most extreme work in speculation: he has no abstruse philosophical vocabulary, he does not coin words to

[1] *Théâtre*, vol. i., Preface No. II. p. iv.

suit occasions. He is withal a practical ethical philosopher. The pure, lofty dreams of the mystical imagination are blended with the simple austerity of the Stoical outlook on life. To those whose spiritual ear is alert, his slightest whispers are inspiring, stimulating—even though they may stimulate to active opposition.

As regards his theory of the drama, he is a philosophical revolutionary—if we may allow ourselves such a paradox. The ancient Stoic philosophy affects him here also. Maeterlinck has the honesty of simplicity, and, as we saw, he frankly acknowledges his guides and helpers. He very frequently quotes Marcus Aurelius and his wise moderation. Sometimes with the name of Marcus Aurelius is coupled that of Antoninus Pius. Marcus Aurelius, with the philosophy he represents, has been a guiding star for Maeterlinck. In the essay on Emerson he writes :—

> But Marcus Aurelius is thought *par excellence*. Besides, which of us leads the life of Marcus Aurelius? Here one sees the man and nothing else. He is not arbitrarily made to look larger, but he is nearer us than usual. I see John felling his trees, Peter building his house, you speaking to me of the harvest, myself giving you my hand; but we all appear at the point at which we touch the gods, and we are astonished at what we do. We did not know that all the powers of the soul were present in us, we did not know that all the laws of the universe were waiting round us, and we turn round and look at one another without saying anything, like people who have seen a miracle.[1]

Even more than to the Stoics does Maeterlinck owe inspiration to the Mystical Philosophers. He

[1] *Le Trésor des Humbles*, p. 136.

is their literary descendant. He has inherited the keen spiritual insight of his predecessors: he has that almost uncanny nearness to the world of soul and spirit that is partly an inheritance, and partly the natural outcome of the reaction from the materialism of the modern epoch.

Though it is not right to put Maeterlinck down as the rigid adherent of any school of philosophy, we can trace in him more connection with the mystics than with any other. He acknowledges his debt to them, and is proud to be their disciple. Those of whom he speaks chiefly are Ruysbroeck, Novalis, and Emerson. There is also frequent allusion to Plotinus, and occasional reference to Swedenborg and Jacob Boehme. The spirituality of their work impressed him strongly, and he responded to it sympathetically. One can have a direct idea of the impression made on him by the mystics, in the essays on the three first-mentioned, found respectively as introductions to his own translations of *L'Ornement des Noces Spirituelles* (by Ruysbroeck), *Les Disciples à Saïs* and *Fragments* (by Novalis), and I. Will's translation of *Sept Essays d'Emerson*. These three prefaces are all reprinted in *Le Trésor des Humbles*.

Maeterlinck's very description of Ruysbroeck l'Admirable is strongly tinged with the mysticism of the old master:—

> Here we suddenly find ourselves on the confines of human thought, far beyond the polar circle of the mind. It is extraordinarily cold, extraordinarily dark, and yet you will find there nothing but flames and

light. But to those who come, without having exercised their souls in these new perceptions, that light and those flames are as obscure and as cold as if they were painted. It is a question here of the most exact of sciences; you must steer your way past all the most rugged and desolate headlands of the divine 'Know thyself,' and the midnight sun reigns over the tempestuous sea, where the psychology of man is mingled with the psychology of God.[1]

Far from being driven to madness by hunger, solitude, and fever, Ruysbroeck had, Maeterlinck tells us, one of the wisest, most exact, and most subtle philosophic minds that ever existed. Unknown to himself, he knew the Platonism of Greece, the Sufism of Persia, the Brahminism of India, the Buddhism of Thibet, and in his marvellous ignorance are found the wisdom of buried ages and the knowledge of unborn centuries.

Ruysbroeck has awakened (he tells us) after a repose of several centuries, not this kind of thought—for this kind of thought never slumbers—but the kind of speech that had fallen asleep upon the mountains where Plotinus, dazzled by it, had left it, putting his hand over his eyes, as if to shield them from an immense blaze.[2]

In his essay on Novalis, Maeterlinck gives his reasons for his choice of these three mystics as subjects for his pen. They lead us, he says, to different heights :—

I have seen mirrored on the horizon of Ruysbroeck's works, those loftiest blue heights of the soul, whilst in those of Emerson, the humbler summits of the human heart show their irregular contours. Here [in *Novalis*] we find ourselves on the sharp and

[1] *Le Trésor des Humbles*, pp. 98–9. [2] Ibid. p. 104.

often dangerous crests of the brain; but there are recesses full of delicious shade, among the green heights and hollows of these peaks, and the atmosphere there is of imperishable crystal purity.[1]

Emerson is more akin to Maeterlinck than any of the other mystics. The essay on Emerson shows a strong tie of kinship between the two. In this essay, Maeterlinck compares Carlyle, "the spiritual brother of Emerson,"[2] with the American mystic. Carlyle, he says, makes the single heroic moments of our being pass before our eyes, against a background of shadow and storm. He leads us, like terrified sheep, through unknown, sulphurous pastures, and thrusts us into the depths of the gloom, lit only by an occasional tempestuous flicker of the star of heroism.

But Emerson, the kindly shepherd of the early dawn, of the pale, fresh fields of a new and natural optimism, does not lead us towards the abyss. He leaves us in the humble, well-known fold, for the same sky is over all, covering the storm-tossed seas and the eternal snows as well as the poor man's house and the bed of the sick. He explains life in a more acceptable way; not that he knows more than others, but he makes his assertions with more courage, and he has confidence in the great mystery. Later in the same essay we find:—

Emerson has come to assert in simple fashion this equal, secret greatness of our life. He has surrounded us with silence and admiration. . . . He has shown us all the forces of heaven and earth, utilised in supporting the threshold on which two neighbours

[1] *Le Trésor des Humbles*, pp. 142–3. [2] Ibid. p. 131.

stand speaking of the falling rain or rising wind, and above two chance passers who meet by the way he shows us the face of a God smiling into the face of a God. He is nearer our everyday life than any other has been. He is the most attentive, the most assiduous, the most honest, the most careful, the most human, perhaps, of our counsellors. He is the sage of ordinary days, and ordinary days are, on the whole, the substance of our being.[1]

There is no essay on Plotinus himself, but there are perpetual allusions to him in the other essays, such as :—

Plotinus is the prince of transcendental metaphysics.[2]
Plato and Plotinus are first of all the princes of dialectic.[3]
Plotinus is . . . the only analytic mystic.[4]

It was Plotinus, Maeterlinck tells us, who strove to analyse, by means of human intelligence, the divine faculty in man. He has experienced in himself the ecstasies that are really only the beginning of the complete discovery of our being. He has studied soul-phenomena. No intelligence has come nearer to divinity than that of Plotinus, according to Maeterlinck. *Le Trésor des Humbles* ends with a citation from Plotinus which is very characteristic of Maeterlinck's own attitude :—

If, in the emotion that this sight must cause you, you do not proclaim that it is beautiful, and if, turning your gaze into your own heart, you do not then feel the charm of beauty, it is vain for you in such a mood to seek for intelligible beauty ; for you would only seek it with what was impure and ugly. That is why what we say here is not addressed to all men. But, if you have recognised beauty in yourself, then raise yourself to the memory of intelligible beauty.[5]

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[1] *Le Trésor des Humbles*, p. 173. [2] Ibid. p. 110.
[3] Ibid. p. 104. [4] Ibid. p. 108. [5] Ibid. pp. 273–4.

Swedenborg's symbolism has an evident effect on Maeterlinck's dramatic works, though less than some critics would have it. The time at which this writer lived is referred to as

> the golden age of Swedenborg, when the air would not allow a lie to issue from the mouth.[1]

One of the root-ideas of Maeterlinck's philosophy is found amongst the ancient mystics: the dynamic force of the human soul. The modern world is becoming increasingly familiar with the ideas of social interdependence and of evolution. Mystical philosophy gave birth to these ideas with respect to spiritual and mental experience. The evolution of the soul, the mystics asserted (before physical evolution was accepted as a fact), is continuous and consecutive; it does not begin afresh in each generation.

Nor does it only derive its capacity, its capabilities, its tendencies, its poverty or riches, from the ancestors of its body, but it is the offspring of the united world-soul of preceding ages, although the soul of to-day may be ignorant of its spiritual ancestry. In the Preface to his translation of Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore,* in speaking of the outburst of poetry among the Elizabethans, Maeterlinck writes:—

> Au reste, nous ignorons quelle influence ces grands phénomènes poétiques ont eue sur notre vie; et je ne sais plus quel est le sage

[1] *Le Trésor des Humbles*, p. 243.

qui à dit que si Platon ou Swedenborg n'avait pas existé, l'âme de ce paysan qui passe sur la route et n'a jamais rien lu ne serait pas ce qu'elle est aujourd'hui.[1]

There is more interconnection, Maeterlinck affirms, in spiritual regions, than people think, in general, and the thought of a world-genius affects something in the soul of the most wretched imbecile, all unknown to him. Human souls are not a collection of separate entities, struggling for individual existence, but one unity, the parts of which work together towards the progress of the whole. Though strongly individualistic in some points in his spiritual doctrine, Maeterlinck is, at heart, a soul-socialist.

A personality that has exercised a very strong influence over the mind and work of this thinker is Carlyle. He cannot be classed with the mystics wholly ; he stands apart, though he inclines towards them. We have seen that the Carlylian idea of silence impressed itself strongly on Maeterlinck. The first quality of Carlyle's silence is negative ; the grim, silent philosopher was tired of the clash of tongues. " Let man be quiet and he will have less harm to repair," was his first impatient cry ; " let man meditate *in silence* beside his fellow-man." Gradually his silence became positive, constructive, and there evolved itself the theory of the beauty and force of a silence acting as thought-medium between human souls. The root-ideas of Maeterlinck's silence are Carlylian : the elaboration is

[1] Preface to Ford's *Annabella*, p. xi.

Maeterlinck's own ; Carlyle's silence is less elusive, less mystic, more relative, than the pregnant Maeterlinckian silence. Carlyle would not say that the silence of an inarticulate child was finer than the speech of Marcus Aurelius.

In the theory of the universal soul-growth, again, Maeterlinck joins hands with Carlyle, and at the same time reaches a further grasp into the theories of the more mystical philosophers. But one can see the direct inspiration that such passages from Carlyle as the following would have for Maeterlinck :—

> It is a high, solemn, almost awful thought for every individual man, that his earthly influence, which had a common cement, will never through all ages, were he the very meanest of us, have an end.
>
> Some traces of our presence may also be left behind us in this pilgrimage of life, some grains added to the great pyramid of human endeavour. What more has man to wish for ?

We have already noted the effect of mysticism—probably partly conscious and partly unconscious—on Maeterlinck's early mood and work, helping him towards his optimistic philosophy.

What other elements did the mystical tendency produce in Maeterlinck? The radical change of point of view, induced by the causes already mentioned, developed a more altruistic spirit. The attitude of the *Serres Chaudes* is one of pure egoism, in which the early dramas share, particularly *Maleine* and the *Sept Princesses*. The altruism of this philosophy, so alluring to him, helped the

young author to plunge deeper into the real life of others, and comprehend the macrocosm as well as the microcosm.

We do not say that mysticism was the only influence at work to operate this change; youth —though, in general, generous in impulse—is intensely egotistic in thought and in reflection on emotion. The adolescent easily persuades himself that no one has suffered as he has, that the world has never looked so black to any one as to him. A riper age dispels the illusion, and, in the case of Maeterlinck, maturity would, in time, have rendered him less melancholy-minded. But this was done more fully, nobly, and swiftly by his generous aptitude to draw in the best from the creeds which were open to his view, and by his particular inclination towards that attitude of mind, known as mystic, which has produced so much spiritual loftiness. The transcendentalism of the mystics is transcendentalism of the spirit rather than of the mind, reached not so much by a chain of reasoning as by a series of high spiritual emotions.

The lofty standpoint so gained makes him who has gained it see more deeply into the truth of things; mystical truths, Maeterlinck tells us, have a strange privilege over ordinary truths: they never grow old; time exists not for them: a work only ages in proportion to its anti-mysticism.[1]

That Maeterlinck considered the works of the mystical philosophers of dominant importance, not only in his own life and thought, but also in those of

[1] *Le Trésor des Humbles*, p. 111.

the world, is shown by the reason he alleges for his translation of Ruysbroeck :—

> Now, if I have translated this, it is only because I believe that the writings of the mystics are the purest diamonds in the tremendous treasure-house of humanity. . . .[1]

Apart from the ethical quality bestowed by this tendency, there is an æsthetic advantage derived from it : it gives atmosphere—that sense that is curiously lacking in all mediæval works of art, except the mystic, and is still lacking to-day in much of our art, literary and otherwise. It is there in Maeterlinck's prose, helping to lend it its fascination of wondering interest ; it pervades the dramas, giving them that pure poetry of vision that awakens a responsive thrill in the initiated, though it may make the uninitiated smile in a superior fashion, because he does not understand any but the surface meaning, and does not know that he does not understand. But beauty and truth are there in abundance, whether you may care for their presentation or not.

Mysticism has, however, no more the last word to say on Maeterlinck than Stoicism has. In one point he stands distinctly apart from both of these, from the self-imposed restraint of the Stoic and the natural austerity of the mystic : in love of life and its natural joys. He indulges in vigorous bodily exercise, with a healthy enjoyment of it. He is fond of animals, and interests himself in the rearing

[1] *Le Trésor des Humbles*, p. 111.

of them; he delights in anything that has growth, physical and mental; he loves life because it is life.

A certain strain in Maeterlinck we can attribute to the teaching of Nietzsche, partly in accordance with it, partly in opposition to it—viz. his glorification of man and his powers and capacities. The theory of the superman lies there; the power of enlargement and inspiration for the human race by something that is still closely connected with the human, that is not yet entirely Divine. And even in that very point there is a difference: Nietzsche insists on the necessity of a *super*man for the regeneration of mankind, while Maeterlinck would place all possibilities in *man* himself. In one of his few allusions to Nietzsche, Maeterlinck contrasts his philosophy with that of Tolstoy, as egoism *versus* altruism. Maeterlinck's own philosophy tends to be egoistically altruistic; to demand self-development first, but solely for the benefit of the development of the world of which each one forms a part.

One would not be tempted to put Schopenhauer among the notable influences on Maeterlinck's thought, were it not that the latter himself pays a special tribute to him at the end of an article [1] entitled "Les Éducateurs de ma Pensée." He writes:—

To Germany also I owe much. I have studied its classics, and particularly one of its contemporary philosophers, Schopenhauer,

[1] *Les Annales*, March 5, 1911.

whom I read entire. What I prefer in his works are the "Parerga" —the side-works, more interesting, in my idea, than his systematic treatises.

II. Literary.

A thing that strikes one very strongly in reading Maeterlinck is that there is, in his work, curiously little allusion to French literature, although he is a close student of it. There is, strangely enough, more reference to English literature, the term here being used to include the literature of the English-speaking people. Greek and Roman history and literature are mentioned frequently also, and German, Russian, and Scandinavian are occasionally present.

In French literature most frequent reference is made to Balzac and Racine; the former the master-builder of the *Comédie Humaine*, the latter one of the first names in French drama and a pioneer of the feminists, if one may so use the term with reference to the first who tried, on the French stage, to differentiate between the characteristics of a man and those of a woman, and to give some analysis of the female character. He who makes any study of contemporary manners must needs cite Balzac: he supplies personages and situations for most of the ordinary eventualities of life; he forms, as it were, an encyclopædia of types, character-groups and genre-pictures. Maeterlinck has, like all who read to write, assimilated Balzac, somewhat, though in lesser degree, as one assimilates Shakespeare, because he is no

longer the property of one time or of one people, but belongs to the world at large.

To Racine Maeterlinck looks as his predecessor in drama in more ways than one. Racine might have been the father of the "Static Drama," which the more modern playwright seeks to found. In "Le Tragique Quotidien," Maeterlinck quotes from him as follows :—

> They have admired (says Racine, in his Preface to *Berénice*)—they have admired the *Ajax* of Sophocles, which is nothing but Ajax killing himself with grief because of the fury he feels after being refused the arms of Achilles. They have admired the *Philoctetes*, whose whole subject is merely the coming of Ulysses to take by surprise the arrows of Hercules. The *Œdipus* even, although full of discoveries, is less charged with matter than the simplest tragedy of our days.[1]

Racine is also Maeterlinck's predecessor in the matter of the understanding of women.

On this point Maeterlinck, however, is curiously contradictory. In *Le Trésor des Humbles* he speaks of Racine being the infallible poet of the heart of woman, but, he questions, who would dare to say that Racine had made one step towards her soul?[2] What could any tell us of the soul of Andromaque? (As Britannicus is included in the question, the indictment includes Racine's treatment of both men and women.) Then, in the Introduction to *Annabella,* Maeterlinck speaks of Ford being almost Racinian at times, of his heroines having such a soul as there is in Bérénice or Andromaque.[3]

[1] *Les Annales*, p. 170. [2] *Le Réveil de l'Âme*, p. 32.
[3] Introduction to *Annabella*, p. xiii.

Is the word *âme,* which is used in both cases, to be read with a different meaning in each?

Beyond Balzac and Racine, there are few in French literature to whom Maeterlinck owes a direct debt, if we except the debt that the "heir of all the ages" owes to these ages.

The modern group of his friends and acquaintances played their part in influencing him: Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Stéphane Mallarmé, Catulle Mendès, and others, especially the first, of whom Madame Maeterlinck, in her charming Introduction to the *Morceaux Choisis* writes:—

> The curious figures of Villiers de L'Isle-Adam produced on his youth an impression that still haunts his memory.[1]

We must, however, go to English literature for the dominant influence in Maeterlinck's work. One cannot read a dozen pages without coming across a mention of Shakespeare, a quotation or the introduction of a character from one of his plays. All the references to Shakespeare to be found in Maeterlinck would fill a volume by themselves: Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, start, like the pictures of living friends, from his pages; they are the background of similes, the subject of comparisons, the groundwork of essays, the prototypes of personages in the Maeterlinckian drama. *La Princesse Maleine* is a distant reflex of *Hamlet* with a mixture of *Macbeth* and *King Lear*. Young Hjalmar is a degenerate descendant of Hamlet,

[1] Collection Nelson, *Morceaux Choisis de Maurice Maeterlinck*, Introduction, p. 8.

Queen Anne might be a sister of Lady Macbeth, with less straightness of purpose, and the poor old King sounds a faint echo of Lear. *Joyzelle*, again, would not have existed if there had been no *Tempest*. Old Merlin himself might be partly the result of Prospero, and partly of Malory's and later of Tennyson's picture of Merlin.

Much of the Maeterlinckian drama, though opposed in aim to the Shakespearean drama, is, in essence, Shakespearean: Maeterlinck has drawn long draughts from that ever-welling source of inspiration. He considers that Shakespeare is his, as the Bible is his, a possession for all time, and who shall say him nay? It is interesting to observe that, although some of his heroes reflect Shakespearean personages, practically none of his heroines do. We found in Queen Anne a likeness to Lady Macbeth; that is the only likeness among the women of his plays. They are of a different type, all his own, the soul of woman awakening from age-long sleep.

If one wished to quote Maeterlinck's views on Shakespeare, it is not one but a hundred passages one would have to quote. Perhaps the most pregnant expression of his opinion is to be found in the saying that Shakespeare is, after all, comparable only to himself.

Alongside Maeterlinck's almost passionate admiration for the Master Dramatist, it is interesting to place his views on the other Elizabethans, whom he knows better than many an English student of literature. In his Preface to *Annabella* we find

this admiration warmly expressed. In speaking of the Elizabethan period he says :—

> Nous sommes au centre même d'une des périodes le plus extraordinaires de la beauté tumultueuse et folle comme la mer. Il s'agit en effet de la mer, et du plus grand océan de poésie qui ait jamais battu les falaises informes de la vie quotidienne. Cet océan qui est vraiment le *Mare poetarum* des mappemondes spirituelles, la mer la plus puissante, la plus énorme et la plus inépuisable qu'il y ait eue jusqu'ici sur notre planète terre, est presque inconnu des lettrés . . . et . . . elle doit cependant, s'il est vrai qui des intelligences supérieures nous contemplent, marquer à leurs regards, l'endroit et le moment les plus largement lumineux de notre globe.
>
> . . . . .
>
> Des jours semblables ne reviendront peut-être plus, et, cependant, de tels excès de poésie doivent avoir une influence étrange sur l'histoire inconnue de notre âme.[1]

Among the stars of the brilliant constellation, Maeterlinck selects Ford for especial study and admiration, because of his mysterious gift of reading far into the human soul, especially the soul of woman, hitherto almost unsuspected. He says that " the *Broken Heart* of Ford is an admirable poem, in which for the first time, in scenes of stainless beauty, the force, invincible yet very sweet, of a great woman-soul was revealed in literature ; for Ford is the most profound feminist of the Shakespearean pleiad." [2] In Ford's plays woman had already begun to have something more than that which had been attributed to her among his predecessors or contemporaries : she had formerly been judged a beautiful, tender apparition, reflecting ex-

[1] Preface to *Annabella*, pp. vi–vii. [2] Ibid. p. xii.

ternal events and influences. In Ford, she begins to show that she has a soul of her own: it may have to be awakened, but it is there. His heroines have an internal life that is "sweet, strong, and silent"; they do not cry out, and they speak very little. When they speak from the depths of misery, they say only a very few simple words. Once more, silence and simplicity![1] Is it a wonder that Ford was singled out by Maeterlinck from among the Elizabethans?

It was not purely the dramatic among this extraordinary group that affected Maeterlinck most strongly. That had its influence indeed, but the quality that appealed most to his essentially poetic nature was the lyric force in these dramatists. He is swept away by the lyrical flood Shakespeare lets loose: nothing can stand before it. And the other Elizabethans, each in his own manner and degree, are lyrical poets, no less than dramatists.

In the essay on *King Lear*,[2] Maeterlinck speaks of the difficulty of introducing this lyrical stream into drama, without losing the lifelike naturalness of dramatic conception and form. The choice, he says, lies between being lyrical or simply eloquent but unreal (and that is the fault of French classical tragedy as well as of the romantic school of Victor Hugo and all the other French and German romanticists), and natural, but flat, dry, and prosaic. In *Romeo and Juliet* and in the historical plays Shakespeare shows the former ten-

[1] Preface to *Annabella*, p. xiii.

[2] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, pp. 195–209.

dency. In the great tragedies, when he wishes to let loose the lyrical flood, he unbalances the reason of his protagonists, as in *Lear, Hamlet*. The quality and quantity of the lyrical stream are proportioned to the madness of the central hero: so in *Othello* and *Macbeth* it is intermittent, in *Hamlet* more continuous but more meditative, while in *King Lear* the torrent rushes full, exquisite, miraculous, from first to last.

Although we totally disagree with this judgment on *Hamlet*, we feel that the root idea is not untrue. Much of this beauty has invaded Maeterlinck's own dramas, the lyrical quality of which, in suggestion as well as in speech, is one of their chief beauties. The young lovers in *Alladine et Palomides* are exquisite visionaries, and their conception of the universe is sheer poetry. The old king Hjalmar in *Maleine*, and the young madwoman in *Les Aveugles*, too, give Maeterlinck the opportunity and excuse for such an overflow as he found so beautiful and wonderful in the master-poet.

Having found the lyrical in the "virgin forest" of the Elizabethans, as he calls it, Maeterlinck sought it elsewhere in English literature, and began to study the English poets assiduously—in particular Shelley and Browning. The pure poetry of both fascinated him, while the thought that welled deep and full behind the expression of it, exquisite, vigorous, or fantastic as the case might be, lured him on. Of his study of Shelley we do not find much distinct trace in his writings, but *Monna Vanna* is direct evidence of his adherence to

Browning. Indeed, to such an extent is this the case, that Maeterlinck has been accused of plagiarism. But so different are "Luria" and *Monna Vanna* in essence and in final result that it is really only the shell that is the same.

Much of the Browning spirit is to be found in Maeterlinck: the steady forward set of the mind, the courageous optimism and perpetual readiness to "greet the unseen with a cheer." The determinedly and energetically progressive outlook, the unshaken faith in man and his destiny, the belief that "a man's reach should exceed his grasp," and so ever lead him forward—these are common to the two vigorous optimists, just as the power of the fresh-flowing lyrical force, along with rare and sometimes fantastic beauty of expression, is alike Maeterlinck's and Shelley's gift.

No one has been more frequently compared with Maeterlinck than Ibsen. The two are curiously alike, and yet very much at variance. Both show the modern trend of thought, the struggle for emancipation, the refusal to be fettered and bound by convention, the longing for liberty, especially in woman. And yet the methods are divergent, and the atmosphere is widely different. In speaking of Ibsen, Maeterlinck writes:—

> The drama only remains possible because in it one dips into human conscience with a singular light, red, gloomy, capricious, and, one might say, accursed, which illumines only strange phantoms.[1]

But Ibsen is not the only artist whose atmosphere

[1] *Le Double Jardin*, p. 125.

is permeated by a strange, weird light, unlike the pleasant light of day. Just as the colour of Ibsenic tragedy is red and lurid, so that of the Maeterlinckian is now blue, now green, now both, melting chameleon-like into each other. The revolutionary flame-like warmth of Ibsen is lacking; the deadly glitter of the snake is there—the early symbol of the daring human love of that knowledge that lurks under the conventional crust of things. It gleams and lures us on, almost against our will, for it is fatal to the happy, old-time ignorance. And yet we know that it lights the paths by which human knowledge must tread. It is only by seeking and finding the reactionary and conventionally forbidden that humanity will ever make any progress; when it obeys the warning of the orthodox "Thou shalt not eat of the tree of knowledge," it is then that it is foredoomed to failure as a living force, the failure that spells death.

In reading "Le Tragique Quotidien," one can distinctly see that what drew Maeterlinck's admiration to Ibsen was that the latter was trying in his dramas to carry out one of Maeterlinck's own root-ideas for the stage, viz. that it is not merely the outward action, the broadly spectacular, that betrays the hidden human relation, but the inner dialogue, as it were, of soul with soul, sometimes evinced in silence, sometimes in simple words or expression, pregnant with meaning. Maeterlinck says of the chief personages in *The Master-Builder*:—

> Hilda and Solness are, I think, the first heroes who feel for an instant that they live in the atmosphere of the soul, and the

essential life that they have discovered in themselves, beyond their ordinary life, terrifies them.[1]

Another parallel between Maeterlinck and Ibsen is their search after the ultimate power that rules the world, after Fate, which they both interpret differently. We have seen what Maeterlinck's early view was, and how it changed in the later works. Of Ibsen's view Maeterlinck says :—

So Ibsen, in quest of a new, and, so to speak, scientific form of fatality, has placed in the midst of the best of his dramas the veiled, majestic, and tyrannical figure of heredity. . . . It is, in a word, the face of God reappearing. . . .

And again :—

Ibsen is perhaps the only dramatist who has found and put in practice a poetry, still disagreeable, but new, and the only one who has succeeded in enveloping it in a kind of wild, gloomy beauty and grandeur . . . that owe nothing to the poetry of the violently florid dramas of antiquity or of the Renaissance.[2]

An extremely interesting comparison of these two writers, like and yet unlike, is to be found in Georges Leneveu's *Ibsen et Maeterlinck*. In Maeterlinck's earlier productions one can feel the curious thrill of Ibsenism that affected all Europe ; in the later the influence is passing, or almost wholly past.[3]

Russian literature, too, has not been without its effect on Maeterlinck. The curious mingling of

[1] *Le Trésor des Humbles*, pp. 177–8. [2] *Le Double Jardin*, p. 126.
[3] Georges Leneveu, *Ibsen et Maeterlinck*, Paris, P. Ollendorff, 1902.

mysticism and barbarism, of sincerity and cruelty, of simple strength and almost childish weakness, in the Slav, added to the deeply religious strain that comes out strongly in such a writer as Tolstoy, has been during the last century a factor to be reckoned with in European literature. It is a factor that makes for strong impressionism in art, literary and pictorial, an impressionism that has in it much wild, unrestrained, almost barbaric, beauty and strength. We find traces of an impressionism akin to this in the scenic beauty and cruelty of such pieces as *La Mort de Tintagiles, Alladine et Palomides*, and even in *Pelléas et Mélisande*. There is the gloomy beauty of the fierce north, and the wild, sad-eyed, fateful melancholy and savagery of the east. Maeterlinck has felt that peculiar, indefinable trait of the Slav that he can never communicate to any other nation, but that affects every impressionable mind that comes in contact with him.

Of Tolstoy, in particular, the Belgian poet speaks with respect and admiration, comparing him (as has been already mentioned), as the father of a new altruistic philosophy, with Nietzsche, the head and source of the most recent egoistic creed.

The influence of German literature shows itself increasingly in Maeterlinck. Goethe and the Romantic school have been a source of education to him, and we know, from the Preface to *Marie Magdeleine*, that that drama is really based upon Paul Heyse's *Maria von Magdala*.

II. Scientific.

Curiously enough, it would appear to be once more rather the scientific thinkers of the *English* race that have interested Maeterlinck than those of any other nation—to judge from the allusions to his wells of inspiration and information in writing on scientific or semi-scientific subjects.

The works which deal most directly with science are *La Vie des Abeilles* and *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*. There are, of course, the other exquisite little essays on flower-life, but these are more pictorial and poetic than scientific.

In general scientific thought those to whom Maeterlinck chiefly makes reference are Darwin and Huxley. Their absolute sincerity in their search for truth has clearly left its impression on him, and their tendency to reject hypotheses, however alluring, that will not bear the most searching investigation and re-investigation. In *Le Temple Enseveli*, Maeterlinck quotes a letter from Huxley to a friend who had written to him on the death of his son :—

> But the longer I live the more evident it is to me that the most sacred art in the life of a man is his saying and feeling, "I believe that this or that is true." All the great rewards, all the heavy penalties of one's existence are attached to that act.
>
> The Universe is throughout one and the same; and if I do not succeed in unravelling my little difficulties in anatomy and physiology, except by refusing to give my faith to what does not rest on sufficient evidence, I cannot believe that the great mystery of existence will be revealed to me on other conditions.[1]

[1] *Le Temple Enseveli*, p. 154.

Throughout the *Vie des Abeilles* Darwin appears as a sort of guiding light, partly because of his general attitude to life, partly because of his particular scientific researches and theories.

Frequent allusions are also made to Michelet and Réaumur, Hübner, Lubbock, and other practical and theoretical entomologists. They have all had their part in the education of Maeterlinck's thought, directly or indirectly, and few writers and thinkers have been more generous than Maeterlinck in the frank acknowledgment of the sources of his facts and inspirations. He has always keenly realized, as only a great mind can do, the interdependence of thinkers of all stages and varieties and of non-thinkers with these.

As we have already seen, the special appeal of science to Maeterlinck is the search for the ultimate truth of things—he is not possessed with a passion for scientific detail and mathematical accuracy of mental arrangement. But he would fain break through the crust of supposition and convention and traditional beliefs, and reach the heart of the matter.

The clarifying and illuminating effect of this passion for eternal verity we have already traced through the prose and the dramas alike. A man of infinite patience, it is likely that he would have made a brilliant scientist had he given his attention wholly to that side of the elucidation of truth. But the deep, underlying philosophy and poetry of the world, of the universe, made such constant music in his soul, that he was drawn rather to the

composing of one great harmony of the world-system, in as far as his mind should succeed in attaining to it. Science lent its aid to make the measures true, and sweep away the discords made by falsehood.

It is a long time (writes Maeterlinck in the *Vie des Abeilles*) since I gave up seeking in this world a more interesting and more beautiful marvel than truth—or, at least, than the effort of man to know it.[1]

[1] *Vie des Abeilles*, p. 2.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ART OF MAETERLINCK

I. IMAGINATION.
- Nature and man—Sameness in scenery.
- *La Princesse Lointaine.*
- Atmosphere—Fear of sunlight.
- Foreboding, death and mystery.
- Static theatre: Suppression of words.

II. CONSTRUCTION.
- Problem dramas—*Monna Vanna* and *Marie Magdeleine.*
- Evolution of character—Uses and dangers of symbolism.
- Characters only types?—Love of natural health and beauty.
- Women in Maeterlinck's dramas—Skilful development.
- Personalities—Ariane, Ygraine, Astolaine, and Aglavaine.
- Handling of women: cf. Tolstoi—Beautiful names.
- Children in Maeterlinck's dramas.
- Unusual in French literature—Influence of English drama.
- Racine's Joas—Pathos—Humour—*Vers libres.*
- Struggle against conventional form.
- Want of definite form for philosophy.

III. STYLE.
- Genius in harmony with subject.
- (*a*) Prose—Charm of French prose—Vocabulary.
  - Grace and simplicity of Maeterlinck's prose.
  - Satire—Prose and poetry.
- (*b*) Poetry and the drama.
  - Repetition—Canticle of Virgin—Poetry in *Joyzelle.*
  - Lyrical quality in Maeterlinck's drama.

IV. IDEALISM.
- Strong tendency to ideal in middle period.
- Ruysbroeck, Novalis, etc., drama and idealisation.

V. POETIC FUNCTIONS.
- Functions of Poet—Lyric and dramatic.
- Beauty of mystery *versus* truth of reality—Duties of a poet.

The Art of Maeterlinck

I. Imagination

To so great an extent is Maeterlinck an artist that there are some who would rate his value as an artist above that as a philosopher. Without agreeing with such a view, one can, to a certain extent, see a justification for it, such a point of perfection has he reached in his art. In all his utterances the poet is there beside the philosopher.

He has a conception of Nature that is almost Wordsworthian in its inspired insight. One feels a breath of higher pantheism; it pervades most strongly *L'Intelligence des Fleurs* and the short flower essays. Vast and cruel as the forces of Nature may be, viewed from the standpoint of the prose works, yet the dramas show a wonderful sympathy between the fate, and even the moods, of man and the inanimate Nature around him. Were the dramas Maeterlinck's poetic silences from beginning to end, yet one would feel the artist in the dramatist. No touch is wanting in the background to make the picture suggestive of the twilight minds they enshrine, or their dim world groping after a fuller perception of light. The clearer physical light will come with clearer mental light.

The melancholy *saule pleureur*, which figures in so many of the pieces, suggests that there will be reason for tears ere all is done.

There is a certain sameness in the backgrounding, which is by no means accidental; Maeterlinck's artistic sense would not allow that. It is historic, periodic; it indicates the stage of de-

velopment of the persons who move amid these scenes, with their gloomy old castles, falling into ruins, and their dismal, echoing, crumbling subterranean chambers. Maeterlinck is fond of water; there is always water near, sometimes the sea, whose sound seems to throb through all the piece, and sometimes a still, green pool, or a lonely fountain. There are very rarely any rivers.

The heroines, too, bear a strong family resemblance to each other—strange, timid, startled creatures, who have come no one knows whence—but they are not part of the *milieu* in which they are found. They have come from a long way off. Almost any of Maeterlinck's plays might have the title of Rostand's exquisite little piece, *La Princesse Lointaine*.

The heroine seems to picture out Maeterlinck's conception of the human soul—a being pure, beautiful, and yet *une chose capricieuse*, a force to be reckoned with, yet hardly a part of practical human existence: living a still, silent life apart from, and nobler than, her surroundings, a creature that the grosser man cannot fathom, and only handles with danger, and possibly ruin, to himself. This being flits, spirit-like, through the essays and dramas, now pure spirit, now incarnate. She has the most perfectly spirit-like existence in the Arielle of *Joyzelle*.

We find, in their first outlines in the prose essays, other ideas that are gracefully embodied in the dramas. For instance, in *Le Double Jardin*, in the essay entitled "Sur la Mort d'un Petit Chien," the

whole of Act III, Tableau 5, of *L'Oiseau Bleu* is foreshadowed, showing Maeterlinck's ideas concerning the relations of man and the animals. The author says :—

> We are alone, absolutely alone on this chance planet, and among all the forms of life that surround us, not one, except the dog, has made an alliance with us. Some creatures fear us, most of them ignore us, and no one loves us. We have in the plant-world mute, motionless slaves, but they serve us in spite of themselves. They merely suffer our laws and yoke.[1]

Doubtless, from the moment of writing that essay, the possibilities of the dramatic development of it simmered in Maeterlinck's brain till the production of *L'Oiseau Bleu* five years later.

Again, in *L'Intelligence des Fleurs* we find a charming passage on the hours in "La Mesure des Heures," which seems the outline of the group of hours in *L'Oiseau Bleu*, a picture that the practical artist has not realised so vividly as the author paints it here.

Maeterlinck has wonderful skill in the production of atmosphere in his plays. With a stroke of scene-description, with a few words of the first speakers, the atmosphere is created, and it is generally one of mystery, that intense, haunting mystery of human life that appears like a dim ghost in the dramas. He writes of this attitude himself in *Le Temple Enseveli* :—

> The mainspring of these little dramas was the terror of the unknown that surrounds us. One had faith, or rather, some obscure

[1] *Le Double Jardin*, p. 20.

poetic sentiment had faith (for in the sincerest poets we must often separate, to a certain extent, the instinctive sentiment of their art from the thoughts of their real life)—one had faith in tremendous, invisible, fatal powers, whose intentions no one divined, but which the soul of the drama supposed malevolent, attentive to all our actions, hostile to laughter, to life, to peace, to love. Perhaps they were just, at heart, but only in anger, and they exercised justice in a manner so subterranean and so tortuous, so slow and so distant, that their punishments—for they never rewarded—assumed the appearance of the arbitrary and inexplicable acts of destiny.

. . . . . .

This unknown most often assumed the form of Death. That vast, gloomy, stealthily active presence of Death filled all the interstices of the poem. . . .[1]

No words could better describe than Maeterlinck's own here quoted the atmosphere that impregnates the early plays. It was some time before Death ceased to be the prime factor in the piece. A pall-like gloom hung over the scene; when a ray of sunlight did manage to pierce the obscurity it created, not joy but fear, as something unusual and unnatural—for instance, in the scene between Princess Maleine and her nurse in the tower, or that in which Ariane admits the excluded light among the captives of *Barbe Bleue*. This avoidance of brilliant sunlight, this preference for moonlit or shadowy solitudes, this choice of cold blues and greens, all contribute to produce the effect of dream rather than reality, of a curious subconsciousness rather than full, everyday consciousness. One is tempted to call Maeterlinck's drama, especially his early pieces, the drama of the subconscious (*l'inconscient*).

[1] *Le Temple Enseveli*, pp. 112–13

The whole of his drama is based on his natural craving for simplicity and silence. That neither Maeterlinck, nor Carlyle, nor Emerson, nor any other preacher of the gospel of silence *fully* believed his own gospel is abundantly evident from the number of their published works. But at least Maeterlinck is true to his doctrine in making silence play a part in his dramas. In Pelléas' and Golaud's subterranean expedition, as in *L'Intruse* and *Intérieur*, there are silences that can be felt. The actors must needs be more skilled in soul-expression than are ordinary actors to bring out that dominant idea that unites all these various plays in one common bond. It was from these two essences that Maeterlinck drew his idea for his static theatre, of which we have already spoken. In "Le Drame Moderne" he shows the trend of modern stagecraft, his own not least of all. He writes :—

> What, at the first glance, characterises the drama of to-day is, to begin with, the weakening, or, so to speak, progressive paralysis of exterior action, then a very clear tendency to dip into the human conscience and to grant a greater part to moral problems; and finally the search, still somewhat a blind one, for a sort of new poetry more abstract than the old.[1]

Silence has a much greater value for the dramatist Maeterlinck than it had for Goethe, for Shakespeare, even for Racine—indeed, for any dramatist of the past. Look at *Intérieur*, the glorification of the doctrine of silence: those

[1] *Le Double Jardin*, p. 110.

principally concerned in the tragedy do not speak a single audible word during the whole piece ; their state of mind, their soul—in as far as one man can read into another's soul by his visage and his actions and his spiritual presence—is perceived by the spectators on the stage and interpreted to the spectators in the theatre.

This is a most extreme example of what Maeterlinck has chosen to call the "static theatre," or theatre of soul-states, rather than that of bodily actions. As M. Émile Fauget has described it :—

> M. Maeterlinck is pressing forward with all his might towards establishing a drama that shall have neither superficial action nor passion, that shall only express the calm depths of the human soul, or its slow, dumb, mysterious workings, and our subconscious ego. This drama he calls by a very pretty name—the "Static Drama."[1]

In the banishment of action is expelled what has been considered the mainspring of the drama : the classical drama *related* its stirring actions, the so-called romantic drama *enacted* them vividly upon the stage. Although the conditions of the classical drama appear, at the outset, to differ considerably from this more modern conception of stagecraft, if we examine them a little more closely we shall find that they do not differ so much, after all. The followers of the classical school objected to violent action taking place on the stage, and adopted the device of using messengers, confidants, etc., in order to introduce the report of any action into

[1] *Les Annales*, 5 mars 1911, p. 232.

the spectacle. On this head Maeterlinck only seeks to go a little farther: he would consider the violent action reported by the messengers and others as arbitrary and intrusive, and exclude such from his pieces, with the effect of obtaining a greater unity of action than even the rigid classicals had ever dreamed. As for the other two unities, Maeterlinck would, with the Romantic school, shake himself free of them and walk his way untrammelled. He considers the demand for the strikingly spectacular as barbaric, and would weave his drama round soul-states rather than bodily acts.

But here again one thing gives us pause—a point on which we have already touched: Maeterlinck insists strongly that the loftiest thought culminates in act, that one act is the noble moral fruit of many thoughts. Why, then, banish action to such an extent from the stage in favour of thought?

Maeterlinck goes even farther: he aims not only at the suppression of action, as far as possible, but he would seek also to make words cease to be the only medium for the transmission of ideas. Words fail to express finer and subtler ideas, he argues; a time is coming when man will be able to communicate with man more clearly and finely than by words. When we can understand and utilise the spiritual atmosphere about us we shall be able to hold communication in silence, each one reading the spirit of his fellows and flashing back his answer.

In the time to come, that may be, in the ordinary

life of the spiritually minded, but it will be long before this spiritual quickening reaches the minds of those whose main work in the world is the work of their hands, who, therefore, will be always more hand-trained than brain-trained. And it is very questionable, even with the public educated more highly, finely, and purely than now, whether it would frequent the theatre were the spectacular element to be so rigorously suppressed as the establishment of such a species of drama would suggest. Only time will show whether the " Static Theatre " is to be the theatre of the future.

II. Construction.

Through the mystical and pictorial effects of the dramas, as we have seen, there are indications, in varying degree, of some philosophic end or ideal in view. Such an attitude is too essential to the real Maeterlinckian spirit for it not to appear, consciously or unconsciously. The dramas in which some sort of question is most evidently put to the more purely intellectual external forces are *Marie Magdeleine* and *Monna Vanna.*

In the latter, the question asked is the old, subtle one, What is truth? Must I assert as truth what is a lie for me because it is a truth for you? Must I declare my truth when it is a lie for you? Is silence the only solution? Maeterlinck chooses, in his play, the first suggestion, because, as well as its underlying stratum of truth, it offers the greatest dramatic possibilities here.

What is truth for one may be falsehood for another, because his mind cannot grasp the breadth and purity of his neighbour's truth. The narrowness and baseness of Guido's mind rejects as falsehood not only the finer and higher truth of Vanna's mind, but, if we may call it so, the absolute truth of facts (represented, we must remember in fairness, only by those he considers he has reason to mistrust). No glimmer of the eternal verities shines through this man; his own truth is so poor and base and rigid that he has no perception of a larger, nobler truth that reveals a finer nature. To him the wider truth is a lie, as the ignorant declared it false that the world was round, because they could not see where it curved, or that it moved, because they could not feel its motion. The light in Guido was darkness—darkness that made dark the light that approached it. Since he resolutely refused to understand what light was, was not the only possible thing to leave him in his gloom and speak to him as from one darkness to another?

In the end we are left with the suggestive general problems, springing from that of personal truth: Can a man who determinedly keeps his eyes shut and refuses to see ever be made aware of the light? Can he to whom the ugliness of life in its only reality ever comprehend that there is beauty in it? What must be our attitude towards the wilfully blind? Are we to leave them to their own conception of truth or to fight a never-ending, and it would seem useless, battle with them?

Behind these special problems lurks the special

point as to the right that Monna Vanna would have had to leave Prinzivalle to his fate, a point which obscures the absolute clarity of the problem by introducing a personal and mediate element.

In *Marie Magdeleine* problems of a different sort await us. Beside the general question of ethics and accepted morality lies the subtle problem of the truth of revealed religion, a point not strongly presented here as a problem, but of necessity permeating the whole. Had this big-souled, spiritually minded Galilean a right to the tribute of the whole man, body, soul, and spirit? How is his figure to be ranked among the world's heroes? The admiration and imitation of an ideal standard of goodness and beauty of life are inculcated with inspired enthusiasm, and the whole showing is (as in the prose works) that Christ ranks rather as one of the world's spiritual heroes than as the only incarnate emanation of the Deity earth has yet seen.

One English critic, who not long ago brought out a book on Maeterlinck—but it is hardly to be taken seriously throughout, so lofty and patronising at times, and at times flippant, is the tone—declares that Maeterlinck has not created a single human character. From the dreamy, undeveloped girls of the earlier plays, the critic has evidently not been able to follow through and trace the development of the human soul in the later works. He complains that some of the characters talk philosophy. I suppose he would complain that Shakespeare's characters talk in blank verse, and do not use commonplaces all the time!

That there is a certain uniformity of type in the early dramas, especially in the heroines, all will admit, but that their pictured personalities have distinct individualities no discriminating judge will disallow. There is a gradual but distinct change in Maeterlinck's handling of human character in his plays, from the shadowy figures that flit over the half-lit scene in *La Princesse Maleine* or *Les Sept Princesses* to the vigorous personalities of *Monna Vanna* or *Marie Magdeleine*.

As well as the sunnier atmosphere Maeterlinck attains in his later work, he has also gained a greater hold on life and reality than his early work shows. His touch has become much more widely human, and now he paints with that broad truth of delineation which is the result of the most consummate art, and of that knowledge of human nature that alone makes the truest art possible. Like Tyltyl in *L'Oiseau Bleu*, he can turn the diamond and look into the soul alike of living beings and inanimate things: it is the spiritual essence that he sees and tries to reproduce, the inner truth, the ego.

Monna Vanna and *Marie Magdeleine* show most distinctly this advance in work, though it is also seen in *Joyzelle* and *Ariane et Barbe Bleue*, in spite of Maeterlinck's own somewhat diffident declaration on the subject of the last. In the end of the Preface to the collected edition of his plays he writes:—

As for the two little pieces that follow *Aglavaine et Sélysette*, viz. *Ariane et Barbe Bleu, ou une délivérance inutile*, and *Sœur Béatrice*,

I should like no misunderstanding to arise with regard to them. It is not because they are posterior that an evolution or new desire is to be sought in them. They are, properly speaking, little *jeux de scène*, short poems of the sort unhappily called "*opéra comique*," intended to supply the musicians who had asked for them with a theme suitable for lyrical development. They pretend to nothing more, and my intentions would be misunderstood if readers were to try and find in them great moral or philosophical thoughts hidden beneath the surface.[1]

In spite of this declaration of superficiality, so to speak, there is a very obvious (possibly unconscious, but none the less evident) development of power in the handling of the material, which makes these pieces more instinct with the real spirit of life than some of the former, more seriously intended pieces.

In *Ariane et Barbe Bleue*, the contrast of character is drawn with a skilful touch. The frail, shadowy, gracious women of the early plays, those timid, shrinking creatures who had not yet learnt to possess their souls, are startled into sudden life by the strong, beautiful, progressive Ariane, the type of the awakening feminine of the twentieth century, not the "eternal feminine" of past ages, who gave the lie to her own soul and individuality. The strength of Ariane beside the weakness of the other women is typical of the greater strength of Maeterlinck's later plays beside the earlier, as regards character-drawing. Ariane is a born leader, whose "first duty is to disobey" the cramping injunctions of those who would fetter

[1] Preface to *Théâtre*, p. xviii.

her spirit. She has both strength and sweetness of character, and Maeterlinck's own love for beauty; she breaks down the imprisoning wall around her frightened sisters, only to find that they are too much bound in their shackles to dare to be free, and too much accustomed to the darkness not to fear and shun the light.

When one reads *Monna Vanna*, one feels the living reality of the pictured personalities. They are breathing human beings, faithful as images of Nature for all time, true in life and sentiment to the period to which they belong. They remind one forcibly of the vivid life of our stirring Elizabethan drama. Vanna, Marco, Guido, Prinzivalle are admirably drawn against a background glowing with the barbaric splendour of Italian war-pageantry of the fifteenth century. Browning has hardly more colour in "Luria." Only, we come to ask ourselves, was the end inevitable? Was the lie that Giovanna gave to her own beautiful nature what she owed to it? That she owed Guido no more her own heart told her; but she was great enough to consider what she owed to herself—a nobler, purer truth than was due to Guido. Her soul was sufficiently noble not to fashion its life on the lower life of another, whatever bodily constraint she might suffer in doing so. A tragic climax was to be expected, but one feels the same sense of disappointment with Vanna's falsehood as with the treachery of Diana of the Crossways. Is it simply that the noblest of human characters fail at one point when the strain is too great? Are

they all the more truly and widely human on that account? And is it an untrue idealism to expect the perfection of form of a faultless statue from a plastic human creature? The whole character-painting of *Monna Vanna* is so masterly that it seems hypercritical to demand in the heroine the ultra-exceptional, and not merely the typically noble human being.

In *Marie Magdeleine* reality holds us again in its grip; we find the same comprehension of the vital forces of human nature, the same keen knowledge of the motive power and of its actions. Mary Magdalene herself, her lover Lucius Verus, the old philosopher Annœus Silanus, and the characters that go to make up the massed groups of the third act, are drawn with the most skilful hand; their actions are motived by a thorough understanding of human nature in general, and also of the times in which they lived. The nationality, perhaps, makes less difference in character than it should, but the truth to the basal human elements is there.

Those final groups of the sick and maimed, who had been healed and restored to life by Jesus of Nazareth, and then, in the hour of his need, abandoned him, out of fear for their own lives, are painted most realistically. Their selfish terror marks them off at once as the type of those whom Christianity, with all its beauty, seeks in vain to reach—those who take the world's benefits with both hands open and outstretched, and declare themselves the perpetual worshippers of the God

who sends them benefits. But, let a sacrifice be demanded of them, let them be asked to give up never so little of these same benefits, and on the spot they renounce the God who benefited them, and will have no more of him. The heart of this crowd is the same as the heart of the flattering throng of sycophants who filled the halls of Timon of Athens when he was wealthy and powerful, and knew him not when he became a misanthropic cave-dweller, until such time as they considered that something more was to be gained from him.

It was the women who stood firm, and did not let their adherence to Jesus of Nazareth waver. Mary Magdalene, the staunchest of all, speaks like an inspired prophetess, in her final interview with her sensual lover, Verus, when he comes to claim her unworthily. The curious mingling of the philosophic doctrines of the cultured with the democratic enthusiasm of the followers of the Nazarene makes in itself a picturesque contrast that appeals to one who is at the same time philosopher and dramatist.

That Maeterlinck's plays are not, like those of the so-called realists and romanticists, purely studies in the great human drama, none can doubt. They are both less and more. The how much more is the question that has set the brains of the most ingenious critics to work. The result of the labours of some would be absolutely ludicrous, if one could keep from a whimsical admiration of their intensely complicated ingenuity. Here it is the passion for

labels that has led the critics astray. Maeterlinck is something other than a dramatic artist who paints from sheer love of his art, they say; he must be a Symbolist, and that in all his works.

In the same way was Ibsen dubbed a Symbolist by his earliest critics; but one, at least, the most intelligent of these, Mr. William Archer, whose work is always informed with a spirit of candour and justice, has lived to regret it and to retract his view, as is shown in the frank and understanding letter addressed to Mr. A. B. Walkley, published along with the authorised English translation of the *Master-Builder*.

There is certainly more justice in calling Maeterlinck a Symbolist than was the case with Ibsen. But when Maeterlinck does not dip his brush in reality, he often tints with metaphor rather than symbol. Symbols are so arbitrary, and have been so much used in this old world, that the greatest artist fears to lose his freshness or his meaning in employing them. The attempts to read complicated symbols into all Maeterlinck's plays has misled the average reader to such an extent that he stumbles over simply dramatic situations, pausing to ask constantly, what does this or that mean?

Such an attempt is fatal to understanding the real beauty of the dramas. As he tells us in *Le Temple Enseveli*, Maeterlinck considers that a serious revision should be made of the beauties, images, symbols, and sentiments that we use for amplifying in our minds the world-drama. In view

of what has been said about him, his own words are interesting :—

> It is time the poets recognised that the symbol suffices to represent provisionally an established truth or one that men cannot or will not yet look in the face ; but when the moment comes in which they desire to see the truth itself, it is right for the symbol to vanish. Moreover, for a symbol to be worthy of really living poetry, it must be at least as great and beautiful as the truth it represents ; also, it must precede, and not follow, a truth.[1]

Although Maeterlinck the philosopher would fain preach in word-pictures in his dramas, Maeterlinck the artist knows too well the shipwreck that would be the result of over-pressed symbolism, to indulge too far in such an obvious device. The early tendency towards symbolism disappears largely in the later works, except in *L'Oiseau Bleu*.

We have already observed the curious blue and green light which this poet sheds over his dramas and early poems. Colour, too, plays its part in *Serres Chaudes*. White, for example, symbolises sometimes purity and innocence, sometimes intense weariness ; green may be hope, or mourning, also lassitude, and so on. Animals also are used as symbols, but, like the lights and colours, they are variable and sometimes vague. The white peacocks of the *Serres Chaudes*, the lamb of Alladine, frightened away by Palomides, the doves of Mélisande, scared by Pelléas, are types of the symbols used by Maeterlinck, the first standing for ennui (an arbitrary symbol), and the others being the

[1] *Le Temple Enseveli*, p. 131.

time-worn representatives of innocence, less often made synonymous with ignorance in Maeterlinck than in many other past and present writers.

Much time has been spent on the criticism and explanation of Maeterlinck's symbolism.[1] One ingenious American critic, with more smartness than intelligence, insists that the dog in *Les Aveugles* must be *dog*ma, from the very name! (He evidently reads Maeterlinck only in translations.) The reading into his work of an elaborate symbolism may be an amusement for one who considers the study of symbols *per se* an important part of literature, and, like one critic,[2] thinks fit to cram the play with symbols that appeal to himself, and trace back their genealogy to Swedenborg. Such plays, for instance, as *Les Aveugles* and *L'Oiseau Bleu*, we believe to be broadly symbolic, but by no means in every detail, and the artistic beauty of the whole is wrecked by forcing the meaning. A closer study of Maeterlinck's philosophy would put these critics right on some points.[3] *Les Aveugles* shows humanity all astray in the dark, led by one who once had some fitness to be its guide, but had lost even that before he finally died quietly in the midst of his wondering and

[1] *Vide* magazine articles, especially "A Cursory Review of Maeterlinck's Symbolism," in "The Blind," by E. D. Daniels, in *Poet Lore*, vol. xiii. 1901.

[2] Vide *Maeterlinck's Symbolism, the Blue Bird, and other Essays* (1910), by Henry Rose. A. C. Fifield, London.

[3] *On Maeterlinck; or, Notes on the Study of Symbols*, 1911, Henry Rose.

groping followers. It is a parable of positive religion, almost as blind as those it seeks to lead, falling and dying in the midst of those it has led astray. The parable is related without bitterness, but with a convinced sorrowfulness that this is the truth of the position.

L'Oiseau Bleu has had so much said about it that it seems superfluous to say more than that it is a wonderful and beautiful allegory of human search for the wisdom that means happiness, because it enables humanity to guide its life to the ends for which it exists. It encounters many and varied difficulties on the way, through which Light is always its guide and helper. After going in search of extraordinary adventures, it comes to realise that man, though he never attains complete wisdom, learns the truest wisdom attainable from the life that lies around him, and that it is the ordinary, and not the exceptional, that will have the last word.

The plays are full of suggestive pieces that it would be wrong to call symbolism. The opening of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, for instance (obviously influenced by the porter scene in *Macbeth*, but very differently handled), suggests, with its picture of the huge, heavy door so hard to open, and its steps so difficult to wash clean, the utter remoteness of the inhabitants of the castle from the outer air and ways of ordinary life: that door does not open on the life of the every-day world; those steps are not trod by many feet. This is an interior into which few have hitherto penetrated, just as Maeter-

linck's drama was a drama this world had still to learn to know, with its other-worldly atmosphere. The subterranean passages, the gloomy suspicions, and tragic happenings are all suggested by that heavy door and those stained steps.

Metaphor Maeterlinck does use, and to some extent—indeed, to such a point that he has been not unjustly blamed for creating in his plays types rather than living human beings. Maleine and Mélisande might merely typify the woman-soul that is still seeking itself; Alladine and Palomides the young lovers of the romantic period, who see the world *couleur de rose* until the light of real day comes in and shows them the grimmer side of things; Joyzelle, womanly constancy in spite of trials; Ariane, modern feminine progress; and so on. Thus they might strike one reader, while another reader might see in them other characteristics. Witness the dispute among critics as to the inner meaning of *Les Aveugles*, and even of *L'Oiseau Bleu*. Yes, they may be ultimately types, and some of the feebler creations may be nothing, or little else, but the greatest of them—e.g. Giovanna and Prinzivalle, Pelléas, Joyzelle, Ariane, Astolaine, Anne, Ygraine, and some of the old men—are far more than types.

In considering the characters of Maeterlinck's plays, it is the women, with their beautiful names, that draw one's attention first; the men, excepting the old men, are far less realistically drawn on the whole. Golaud, as he is sometimes acted, is not much above the melodramatic stage-villain, and is

very similar in type to Guido; Pelléas, however, has a dreamy, yet boyish, charm about him all his own, and Prinzivalle has a distinct individuality. The crowd in *Marie Magdeleine* is frankly typical, and is only possible on that condition.

After all, the literature that is best understood is the literature of the type. Where a character does something unexpected, as, for instance, Monna Vanna, in her lie at the end of the play, or Diana of the Crossways in the selling of the secret, at once a clamour arises that such a character would not have done such a thing: the type must work itself out logically without the inconsistencies that belong to human nature. This criticism shows how the public has been taught to expect a type rather than a human being full of surprises.

One point in Maeterlinck's drama that is very characteristic in him is his love for health and natural beauty in his characters. He very rarely makes sickness a motif, as Ibsen so frequently does, although in more than one play a doctor figures. In Ibsen the difficulty among the modern dramas is to find a play without a doctor. Even when Maeterlinck does introduce a doctor, he is much less vitally part of the structure. Maeterlinck is not either physically or mentally morbid as Ibsen is. Himself a naturally robust and active man, he loves in human nature all that is healthy and fresh and beautiful. In especial do his women have beautiful hair: in *Ariane et Barbe Bleue* there is a most picturesque study of lovely women.

It is undoubtedly they who are the most in-

teresting personages in Maeterlinck's dramas. His belief that women have keener spiritual insight than men, and more delicate and discriminating instincts, comes out again and again in the plays. It is the women whose instincts lead them to presage aright; it is they who are in the closest relation with Nature and the truth of things. They are alike the pulse and centre of the world.

It is an interesting psychological study to watch the development of woman as shown in the dramas. Maleine and the seven princesses (the first creations) are all fairly bloodless beings—timid, quivering spirits, almost without bodies, it would seem. This depiction is partly intentional, partly unconscious.

L'Intruse, Les Aveugles, and *Intérieur* are less studies of character than of situation: the personality of Death dulls every other. The individuals hardly stand out sufficiently to realise difference in character.

Mélisande is sister to Maleine, but she is wiser and has a fuller nature. She has more dignity and self-possession, but she is still very young and undeveloped.

The soul in Alladine has more knowledge, both spiritual and temporal, and Astolaine has an infinitely richer personality. She foreshadows Aglavaine, one of Maeterlinck's favourite creations.

In *La Mort de Tintagiles,* Ygraine and Bellangère, especially Ygraine, show decided strength of character; they do not calmly submit to the fate that overshadows them and finally carries off little

Tintagiles. Ygraine makes a splendid fight; her last outcry is the whole epitome of human sorrow in its struggle against Death. At first she beseeches, abasing herself in an agony of despair and humiliation to atone for her former rebellion; then she points out other ways in which she might be made to suffer, anything but this, and pleads that it is surely impossible for any one to harm little Tintagiles; then, once more, she implores the inexorable to have mercy, wailing out the infinite smallness of her request: it is only for a moment she asks for Tintagiles; she has not had time, he was so little. After a long, dead silence, comes a final outburst of revolt and hatred, followed by the tears and sobs of a completed sorrow, heart-breaking and desolate.

It is a splendid piece of human revelation. Here is no longer a dumb, timid, submissive soul; it is a soul that feels its wants and sorrows, and makes its demand of all creation and creation's maker, a soul in revolt against wanton cruelty, the world-soul crying aloud in pain against the injustice of Nature. After letting them attain this strength of rebellion, it was a mistake on Maeterlinck's part to make Ygraine and Bellangère colourless, in *Ariane et Barbe Bleue*. Ygraine, at least, deserves to stand or fall with Ariane. It is quite unpardonable of the dramatist to allow the fire in Ygraine's gallant fight and bold declaration, "*Aujourd'hui c'est au tour de la femme*," to flicker out and only linger a short space as dead embers. She was worthy of a better fate. Ygraine

and Bellangère might have been far-away cousins of Minna and Brenda Troil.

"Little Sélysette," too, capable of the last sacrifice of life, deserved to be remembered as something nobler than one of the frightened crowd in Blue-Beard's harem.

One is pleased to meet all those beautiful apparitions again, but Maeterlinck does several of their characters less than justice in *Ariane*. The excuse is that *Ariane* is not to be taken seriously. Sélysette, indeed, has a nobility that is lacking in the wiser Aglavaine; she has a fineness of perception and of feeling that the philosophical heroine lacks. Outwardly, Astolaine and Aglavaine are sisters, but Sélysette and Astolaine are more closely akin in beauty of soul: they are both capable of thinking more of others than of themselves. But it may be that Maeterlinck, objecting to the principle of sacrifice, deliberately tries to make it less lovely than self-development through love or through other ennobling influences.

The fundamental mistake in Aglavaine spoils her for what she was meant to be. Was it possible for a person so noble, with so much spiritual insight as she was supposed to have, to be so blind to the harm she was doing? Sélysette's old grandmother felt instinctively, from the moment of Aglavaine's arrival, the trouble that would arise from the impossible situation. But Aglavaine herself, in spite of her keen insight and nobility of soul, failed to discern the havoc she was making of the happiness of Sélysette, and ultimately in that

of Méléandre. With her gifts, should she not have been the first person to perceive it, and consequently to remove the cause of harm?

This unwarrantable blindness, unfortunately, detracts from the nobility of the picture of Aglavaine, and unconsciously mars for the reader the concrete beauty (if one may say soS of Maeterlinck's own conception of spiritual forces in the everyday world.

In spite of the blemish in Aglavaine, however, which really causes the tragedy, one feels that she shows how nobly Maeterlinck conceived of women; he places them among the seekers for real and ultimate truth, always a test of the high morality and ethical conception of a modern writer. Herein he presents a vivid contrast to Tolstoy, whose opinion of women is one of the most evident marks of his non-progressive and almost Eastern type of mind.

That women should be accredited with keener spiritual insight than men is, in itself, of course, no new thing, but it is interesting and valuable to observe how far that *credo* is an essential part of Maeterlinck's philosophy of life. Naturally, it is a point that reveals itself more in the dramas than in the essays. The stronger women of the dramatic pieces are noble conceptions, in spite of the faults already suggested. Maeterlinck's handling of them is essentially original; there is something of the philosopher in them all—that is because Maeterlinck depicted the inmost spirit of his *dramatis personæ* as it appeared to his own mind.

His is more a soul-picture, a series of states of mind, than a continuous chain of actions. His treatment is partly suggestive of what *Hamlet* might have been like, stripped of the stirring action of the Elizabethan drama. Like G. F. Watts, Maeterlinck has tried to paint the ideal from the actual, to depict the souls of human beings rather than to photograph their exteriors as these appear to men.

The Preface to the collected *Théâtre* shows his views with regard to these his creations. The music of their names adds to their charm; there is a suggestion of old Celtic beauty in some of them. Maleine, Mélisande, Ygraine, Bellangère, Yssaline, Sélysette, Astolaine, Alladine, Aglavaine, Ariane, and the seven sisters whose names are like a symphony, the very sound of these makes music in the ear, and rings again with Maeterlinck's intense love of beauty.

One point in which Maeterlinck strikes a note unusual in the French drama is in the introduction of children into his plays. One naturally thinks at once of Tintagiles; of little Yniold in *Pelléas et Mélisande*, made by his jealous father Golaud to play such a terrible part; of Sélysette's younger sister Yssaline, who is with her on the tower when the tragedy takes place; of the children in *Intérieur* and *L'Intruse*, of Tyltyl and Mytyl in *L'Oiseau Bleu*. The last must be reckoned by itself, as a piece that was written largely for children, and therefore containing many of them.

French drama has been infinitely less willing to

admit children upon the stage than English drama has shown itself to be. The influence here working on Maeterlinck is probably that of the English Shakespearean and romantic schools. The French classical drama had rigidly excluded children. A notable exception to this is Racine's Joas, a child who is already three parts a man. Maeterlinck's children have the minds of children, and the freshness and bloom of early youth. They are excellent studies in child-psychology, with their wondering, open eyes, and smiling lips that are perpetually framing some new query. Yssaline's questioning of Sélysette shows the child-nature through and through, and little Mytyl's continual inquiries directed to her brother, slightly older than herself, are met with just such scorn and impatience as a boy of Tyltyl's age would show. The dialogue is skilfully simple, and profoundly true to nature: it could only have been written by one who understood the child-mind.

In the scene between Yniold and Golaud nothing could be more natural than the way in which the child receives the information that his father is going to give him something; his mind at once becomes riveted to the gift that is coming, and although his father tries to turn his attention away to the subject of *petite mère* and *oncle* Pelléas, and even frightens and hurts the boy, yet little Yniold, with true childlike persistence, always comes back to the question of the gift.

With Tintagiles, who has somewhat of a flavour of Prince Arthur in *King John*, we come face to

face with the *pathos* in Maeterlinck. His handling of the pathetic is his own. He is so much of a fatalist in the views expressed chiefly by the old men, that one feels that the tragic end comes because it must, not because of any concomitance of outward circumstances but because these beings that move across the stage have fatality in them. They have woven the web of destiny for themselves, and so at hardly any point does one feel, in watching them, that that fatal step might have been avoided, that this road that leads to ruin might not have been entered upon.

The outstanding exception to this is Tintagiles. So excellently has Maeterlinck drawn the child, in his innocent helplessness, the prey of forces other and greater than his own, that one longs at every moment to see the brave sisters and old Aglovale baulk the savage queen of her prey. It is the fatefulness of early, cruel death that is drawing its web closer and closer round the doomed child; and the pathos of the little voice, growing ever fainter and fainter, as it calls to Ygraine for help, as it begs her to make a slit in the great door between them, just a little slit, for Tintagiles is so small, so small—the pathos of that lingers in the mind as a cruelty, and refuses to be driven out. The intense tragedy of that scene upon the stage seems almost too painful.

No other scene in Maeterlinck approaches this in real pathos. There is a touching sadness in *Intérieur* as one looks at the members of the family safely at rest or work in the lighted room, think-

ing that they have shut out all possible evil for the night by the barring and bolting of the doors. It is the tragedy of simple domestic life at which we are onlookers, when we witness these good people awakening to the news of the absent daughter's death. We see the telling of the sad tale, the stunned amazement of the shock, the sorrow gathering in the eyes of all, especially in those of the mother, and all our sympathies are awake to this simple, sad, everyday reality. It has nothing of the startling, nothing of the ultra-dramatic. It is the deep tragedy of ordinary human life, accepted without revolt.

Les Aveugles and *L'Intruse* are rather weird than pathetic; Death, in them, is more an awe-some, ghostlike personality than a tragic fact.

Maeterlinck is curiously wanting in a quality that often accompanies an intense feeling for the pathetic; he has by no means a keen sense of humour. Geniuses of very different types have lacked it—Milton, Wordsworth, Nietzsche, and perhaps all the mystics except Emerson. The lack of a sense of humour seems to spring from a certain want of proportion. This does not reveal itself in Maeterlinck in oppressive ponderousness, as in some writers; one observes it rather in his introduction of the slightly grotesque at critical moments of the play. For instance, it betrays a want of feeling for the relative importance of things, and it unduly overstrains one's admiration for the picturesqueness of the scene to make Maleine's nose begin to bleed while she is with Hjalmar in

the park; and surely Sélysette's embracing of Méléandre verges on the ludicrous when her teeth bite through his lip! Such, however, are small blemishes in work that, from its genre, requires a keen sense of humour less than most other genres.

Maeterlinck prefers to go his own way, unhindered by attention to the conventional in literature. The attitude is progressive, but dangerous. The conventions that have arisen from the inner necessity of literature, that it should be cast in form and that certain forms are the best for the expression of certain matters—such conventions are not artificially imposed by the grammarian poets, but have gradually developed from the experience of the greatest geniuses who have stamped their name on literature. To neglect the conventions that spring from the special nature of the work, or of literature in general, is the part of the rash enthusiast who mistakes the beauty of order and self-restraint for a tyrannical prisoning wall. On the other hand, to overstep the limits of purely arbitrary conventions is the part of the strong man, whose work is too great for artificial bounds. Maeterlinck does at times the one, at times the other. He has in him a desire to resist the traditional and conventional in general; his attitude of revolt against the artificiality of the Parnassiens is an attitude that presaged great good for the spontaneity of literature to come.

But revolt may go too far and merge in the chaos of revolution. In so far as his plays are a reaction from what was held to be the essential

supremacy of *action* in drama as opposed to thought-evolution or thought-expression, they should be welcomed with gratitude and admiration, as they open the door to the fresh wind of progress. But where they step from the developed drama to the puppet-show, a desire for difference from the traditional, merely for the sake of difference, creeps in, and the progress changes to retrogression.

Maeterlinck saves himself from severer criticism by his frank acknowledgment that some of his plays will not answer to all the canons of the drama: he deliberately writes the inscription himself, "*Trois petits Drames pour Marionnettes*," and describes *Ariane et Barbe Bleue* as a "*Conte en trois Actes*," and *Sœur Béatrice* as a "*Miracle en trois Actes*." Having read the label, we have no right to complain that the pieces are not something other than the author has inscribed them; we accept them at the face value he gives them, and are glad to find in them more than their outward description asserts. Especially is this the case in *Ariane*, as we have seen.

Another revolt against ultra-classicism is one that is characteristic of a certain side of modern poetry as a whole: the escape from the most artificial of forms to the unrestrained *vers libres*. We find it in Maeterlinck and his school of young Belgium and young France; we find it in America, in Walt Whitman and his followers; we see it in a few poets in England. It is a great force if handled greatly, but it is dangerous in many—indeed, in

most—hands. Maeterlinck is curiously unsuccessful in the use of *vers libres* in most of his *Serres Chaudes*. One feels that the formless form, so to speak, has brought with it formless thought: most of the pieces are chaotic and unsatisfying. In the "Quinze Chansons" (now published with the *Serres Chaudes*), on the other hand, more definite and musical form is combined with a greater sequence and harmony of thought. One of these is an exquisite little piece (No. II):—

Et s'il revenait un jour
Que faut-il lui dire?
  Dites-lui qu'on l'attendit
  Jusqu'à s'en mourir . . .

Et s'il m'interroge encore
Sans me reconnaître?
  Parlez-lui comme un sœur,
  Il souffre peut-être . . .

Et s'il demande où vous êtes
Que faut-il répondre?
  Donnez-lui mon anneau d'or
  Sans rien lui répondre . . .

Et s'il veut savoir pourquoi
La salle est déserte?
  Montrez-lui la lampe éteinte
  Et la porte ouverte . . .

Et s'il m'interroge alors
Sur la dernière heure?
  Dites-lui qui j'ai souri
  De peur qu'il ne pleure . . .[1]

[1] "Quinze Chansons," No. II.

Just such a lyric might have been the dialogue between the gallant Sélysette and her little sister Yssaline when they mounted the tower for the last time. It has been beautifully rendered in English by W. G. Fulford :—

And if he should yet return,
What then shall I say?
Tell him that I watched for him
Dying day by day . . .

And if he, not knowing me,
Question me of you?
Speak him soft, it may be he
Has known sorrow too . . .

And if he should seek for you,
What shall I reply?
Give him then my golden ring,
Making no reply . . .

If he ask why never a step
Wakes the silent floor?
Show him the extinguished lamp
And the open door. . . .

And if he should question still
Of the closing sleep?
Tell him—tell him—that I smiled—
Smiled—lest he should weep. . . .[1]

This rebellion against the traditional and conventional, which is characteristic of the effervescent youth of modern times, has a tendency to set up the formless as opposed to the rigidity of the classical form in the past. Just as we found it

[1] *Academy*, April 15, 1899, vol. lvi. p. 421.

in his poetry, so in his philosophy, the want of form is characteristic of Maeterlinck. He distinctly tells us, in *Sagesse et Destinée*, that we are not to look for a reasoned body of philosophy.[1] In the eyes of the student of philosophy pure and simple—in the eyes, for instance, of the follower of Kant or the admirer of Nietzsche—Maeterlinck has not sufficient weight, nor, it may be, sufficiently systematic elaboration; he is too clear and easily understood—in a word, too popular in style (in spite of alleged obscurity)—to be classed among the great. He makes no system; his thought is not continuous. His writing is mainly in essay form. The only books that have distinct continuity of form are *La Sagesse et la Destinée*, *Le Temple Enseveli*, and *La Mort*. Of these the last two have more continuity of thought than the first, which is really rather a philosophical causerie than the exposition of a system of thought.

But this by no means militates against Maeterlinck as the type of philosopher he seeks to be: he is not, nor does he claim to be, the philosopher of philosophers. He is the philosopher of the people, of everyday life. The artist in him dictates that the form his philosophy is to take will be that of essays, in the manner of Emerson, and in his own inimitable style. He is not to be refused his rank because he speaks to the simple and the humble-minded rather than to the ultra-scholarly, nor grudged the title of "philosopher" because his literary taste gives his philosophy artistic shape

[1] *Sagesse et Destinée*, p. 18.

rather than the scientific form in which weightier philosophies are cast.

Though his form is infinitely more artistic, he approaches English, and, still more, Scottish, philosophers in his ethical purpose, from which he never swerves. An admirer of Carlyle, a follower of Emerson, a devotee of the more mystical mystics, he combines something of them all. In the *Vie des Abeilles* he approaches the scientific method more than in any other work; but Taine's criticism of Carlyle would hold true, in this respect, of Maeterlinck—that his method is rather moral than scientific. His manner, however, is by no means that of Carlyle. It is much more akin to that of our graceful Stevenson.

Maeterlinck through all the crowding influences brought to bear upon him is essentially *himself*. Let us not fall into the crude error of pseudo-criticism, of finding fault with him because he is not Carlyle nor Emerson any more than we should complain of Wordsworth because he is not Keats, or Chapu because he is not Rodin.

III. Style.

Throughout his work Maeterlinck does not seem to have forced himself at all: he has naturally chosen subjects that are the real outcome of his individuality, of his outlook on life. His genius is in complete harmony with his subjects; hence comes the harmony of style. In reading his work, from the point of view of style, one is very much

struck with the fact that there are no incongruities, that each passage is the natural sequence to the one that precedes it, and the equally natural preface to the passage that follows it. The result is a harmony that is often lacking in a style of greater originality and picturesqueness: there are no purple patches.

(*a*) *Prose.*

No other known language has reached the perfection in form that French has attained: it blends the ancient classical severity and discipline with the lively grace and fluidity of a modern tongue. As an instrument of clarity of expression it stands unrivalled. From either a keener sense of language and its balance and music, or a better training at the beginning of life, the average Frenchman mishandles his language infinitely less than the average Englishman, and from the point of view of language the moderately bad French writer is infinitely less painful to read than the moderately bad English writer. Above the rank of the lowest stratum of journalism and letters every French writer is, in some degree, a stylist.

But few have the limpidity of style of Maeterlinck. His prose has the quality of being fluid and musical to a degree that has roused the envy or national jealousy of at least one French critic, who declared that Maeterlinck's idiom was foreign and his constructions clumsy. By those who view literature more dispassionately, the due meed of praise has been accorded, and Maeterlinck is recog-

nised as an artist in words as well as in thought. One reads his writings with the same pleasure that one experiences in living in the midst of a beautiful landscape; one's mentality becomes so much imbued with the beautiful that one finds difficulty in regarding it objectively.

Maeterlinck's prose has the same sort of fascination as that of Robert Louis Stevenson: both satisfy the ear as well as the brain; the language in itself is a pure pleasure, even were it not that it clothes ideas so revealing, so stimulating.

In Maeterlinck here and there we find pieces of sheer music, cadences that pulse and thrill and quiver, and leave the ear gladdened by a never-dying harmony of sound. Such a piece is found in *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*:—

> Songeons parfois au grand vaisseaux invisible qui porte sur l'éternité nos destinées humaines. Il a, comme les vaisseaux de nos océans limités, ses voiles et son lest. Si l'on craint qu'il roule cu qu'il tangue au sortir de la rade, ce n'est pas une raison pour augmenter le poids du lest en descendant à fond de cale les belles voiles blanches. Elles ne furent pas tissées pour moisir dans l'obscurité à côté des pierres du chemin. Le lest, on en trouve partout; tous les cailloux du port, tout le sable des plages y est propre. Mais les voiles sont rares et précieuses; leur place n'est pas dans les ténèbres des sentines, mais parmi la lumière des hauts mâts ou elles recueilleront les souffles de l'espace.[1]

Through the measured and musical cadences of the passage comes the poetry of motion: the winged creature spreading her wings to greet the wind, while the haunting sea-voice lures her on—

[1] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, pp. 268–9.

that voice, with its touch of melancholy and its witching rhythm, that sounds through so many of the plays. It is the same voice that one hears in Victor Hugo's sea-pieces, most movingly in the "Adieu, patrie, azur!" that fascinated Swinburne so much.

Of a different sort of beauty is this other piece of Maeterlinck, conceived in the sun-steeped loveliness of the flowery south. The whole essay, on "La Mesure des Heures," is a poem in prose, of which the following is one of the most exquisite passages :—

Autour du plateau de marbre qui orne la terrasse ou le carrefour des larges avenues et qui s'harmonise si bien aux escaliers majestueux, aux balustrades éployées, aux murailles de verdure des charmilles profondes, nous jouissons de la présence fugitive mais irrécusable des heures radieuses. Qui sut apprendre à les discerner dans l'espace, les verra tour à tour toucher terre et se pencher sur l'autel mystérieux pour faire un sacrifice au dieu que l'homme honore mais ne peut pas connaître. Il les verra s'avancer en robes diverses et changeantes, couronnés de fruits, de fleurs ou de rosée: d'abord celles encore diaphanes et à peine visible de l'aube; puis leurs sœurs de midi, ardentes, cruelles, resplendissantes, presque implacables, et enfin les dernières du crépuscule, lentes et somptueuses, que retarde, dans leur marche vers la nuit qui s'approche, l'ombre empourprée des arbres.[1]

For delicate and imaginative beauty and grace of expression few passages can rival this.

In the philosophical work, where linguistic picturesqueness is not a desideratum, Maeterlinck's style is notable for its smoothness, grace, and simplicity. It is easy to follow the argument in its

[1] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, pp. 132–3.

gradual evolution of thought and gentle fluency of utterance. Even in the writings that tend most to mysticism we find no abstruse philosophical phraseology. His message is to the people, to all those who read and think. He is a philosopher of the school of Emerson, but with less terseness and infinitely more grace of expression. One might read his works as a lover of music might listen to a symphony—for the sheer pleasure of following out a theme beautifully expressed and evolving simply and naturally towards its climax. There is nothing that shocks, nothing that startles, in this harmonious expression of ideas.

Irony is a weapon one rarely finds in the hands of Maeterlinck; one is, therefore, all the more surprised when it appears. Here and there in the *Vie des Abeilles* there is a gentle satire on man, as seen from the point of view of the bees. In one place the writer supposes the earth regarded as from some loftier planet, whose inhabitants judge that those creatures in this world who move about and bestir themselves must be doing a disservice to humanity, since it is they who are so poorly housed and clothed and so badly treated by those stiller and presumably finer creatures dwelling in larger houses and more beautiful surroundings. That gentle sarcasm reminds us that Maeterlinck, in the new act of *L'Oiseau Bleu* that he has written, classes the "luxury of being a landowner" with the "luxury of knowing nothing," the "luxury of eating when one is not hungry," and of "drinking when one is not thirsty," and such pleasures. The

attitude that dictates that ironical exposition is, *au fond*, that of "Notre Devoir Social."

In the end of "Les Dieux de la Guerre," Maeterlinck gives way to another unusual little piece of irony. In speculating on the mighty causes of internal and external motion on this earth, in the form of explosives, he writes, in conclusion :—

> To all these questions the scholar who creates you will reply simply that "your force comes from the sudden production of a great gaseous volume in a space too small to contain it under the pressure of the atmosphere." It is certain that that answers everything, that all necessary light has been thrown on the problem. There we see the very depth of truth, and we know now, as in all things, on what to depend.[1]

As we saw in the passages quoted earlier, the poet in Maeterlinck merges in the philosopher. The result, in the lighter essays and in the dramas, is a strongly poetical prose, an instrument admirably suited for either.

(*b*) *Poetry and Drama.*

Some facile critics have passed their judgment on Maeterlinck almost entirely from the style of his earlier works, to which they always point with a derisive smile at what they call "the childishness of his repeated phrases." How poor alike in critical acumen and psychological knowledge must those be who do not feel that the use of such a literary device indicates less a certain state of mind of the

[1] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, p. 224.

author than a state of mind, or state of development, of his characters.

After all that has been said, the best explanation and justification of the plays is to be found in Maeterlinck's Preface to the recent edition of his collected plays, and in *Le Temple Enseveli*, in the passages already mentioned. Regarded from the point of view of elementary soul-psychology, the style which uses broken and repeated phrases is admirable; it is the undeveloped and obscure seeking for development and gradually finding its way to light and fullness of perception and growth.

This artist's method also creates a certain atmosphere—an atmosphere suggestive of weirdness, a vague feeling of dread, a pathetic ignorance of the Great Unknown. How often do we find the repetition of "*Je ne sais*," or "*Je n'en sais rien*"! In the apparently artless use of this simple instrument Maeterlinck the artist shows himself a past-master. And so long as he is master of his instrument, all goes well—the danger only betrays itself when the machine begins to revolve mechanically of itself, and is no longer guided by the determination of him who set it going. An idiosyncrasy used with art is an originality: when it has become habitual it tends to become lifeless, and a mere peculiarity. In the early work of Maeterlinck this artless repetition of word and phrase, as we have seen, is natural to the stage of development of his characters, and has therefore its own true place. But in the later plays one feels

that here and there, when the same style creeps in, it is the result of habit more than of art, and the artistic satisfaction in the piece is thereby diminished. These small jarring passages, however, occur rarely.

In *Serres Chaudes* we find a frequent use of such words as *vénéneux, las, ennui, malade,* so skilfully introduced and handled that the mere reading of them almost produces the physical sensations suggested by them, just as the introduction of *saules pleureurs* and *cyprès* into the early dramas always gives a keynote of the tragedy to come.

But the whole hothouse and hospital flavour of the *Serres Chaudes* is unhealthy and enervating. The excuse for the atmosphere of mental and physical malady is found in the line

> O mon âme vraiment trop à l'abri![1]

and the suggestion of escape from it is :—

> Moi j'attends un peu de réveil,
> Moi j'attends que le sommeil passe. . . .[2]

Had the *Serres Chaudes* been written by some one who had done nothing else, they would hardly have repaid the study some have spent in trying to produce elaborate explanations of them. As the juvenilia of a man of genius who has a message to deliver and does it elsewhere fully and clearly, they are interesting, if only to see how far beyond them he has grown.

[1] *Serres Chaudes*: "Âme," p. 29.
[2] Ibid.: "Heures ternes," p. 42.

The lyrical in Maeterlinck finds its expression more truly in the "Quinze Chansons" and in the drama. The last of the *chansons* is the beautiful little song of the Virgin in *Sœur Béatrice* :—

À toute âme qui pleure,
À toute péché qui passe,
J'ouvre au sein des étoiles
Mes mains pleines de grâces. . . .

Il n'est péché qui vive
Quand l'amour a parlé,
Il n'est âme qui meure
Quand l'amour a pleuré. . . .

Et si l'amour s'égare
Aux sentiers d'ici-bas,
Ses larmes me retrouvent
Et ne s'égarent pas. . . .[1]

Apart from this delicate little flower of song, there is much of the lyrical element in *Sœur Béatrice*, in *Alladine et Palomides*, in a lesser degree in some of the other plays, but above all it is to be found in *Joyzelle*. The first scene of Act II is a poem in itself ; the stage-directions—very impracticable on the stage, but very beautiful in reading—keep up the lyrical note also, in the poetic beauty of the weeds blossoming into flowers at the touch of love and the exquisitely musical names of those flowers :—

Elle regarde autour d'elle, stupéfaire ; car dès l'entrée de Lancéor, sans qu'ils aient pris garde, le morne jardin s'est peu à peu magni-

[1] *Théâtre*, vol. iii. pp. 194–5.

fiquement transfiguré. Les plantes sauvages, les mauvaises herbes qui l'empoisonnaient ont grandi, et chacune, selon son espèce, a magnifié jusqu'au prodige ses fleurs épanouies. Le chétif liseron est devenue une liane puissante dont les admirables calices enguirlandent les arbres surchargés de fruits mûrs et peuplés d'oiseaux miraculeux. Le mouron blanc est un grand arbrisseau d'un vert ardent et tendre, où éclatent des fleurs plus larges que des lys. La pale scabieuse a allongé ses tiges où se dressent des houpes pareilles à présent à des tournesols mauves. . . . Les papillons volent, les abeilles bourdonnent, les oiseaux chantent, les fruits ce balancent et tombent, la lumière ruisselle. La perspective du jardin s'est étendue à l'infini ; et l'on entrevoit maintenant, à droite, un bassin de marbre, à demi-caché derrière une haie de lauriers-roses et d'héliotrope taillés en arcades.[1]

In its sensuous poetry, that wonderful little piece suggests the passage in Tennyson's "Œnone," describing the coming of the goddess to Paris :—

> And at their feet the crocus brake like fire,
> Violet, amaracus, and asphodel,
> Lotos and lilies : and a wind arose,
> And overhead the wandering ivy and vine,
> This way and that, in many a wild festoon
> Ran riot, garlanding the gnarled boughs
> With bunch and berry and flower thro' and thro'.

In both these passages is the magical vision and fragrance of the flowers, in both their very names have the magic charm, the charm that the poet knows so well how to create simply by the arrangement of their musical syllables.

These are merely suggestions of Maeterlinck's use of the lyrical in drama. We have already spoken of his appreciation of it in others, particu-

[1] *Joyzelle*, pp. 55–6.

larly in the Elizabethans, most particularly in the greatest of all, in Shakespeare, and supremely in his *King Lear*. The poet could not be a worshipper of the Elizabethans without having a lyric song in his own heart, nor could he be an artist without giving expression to it.

IV. Idealism.

There is in Maeterlinck a strong tendency to idealism. The trend of his philosophy is that way. In the early plays it does not show itself strongly, for the shadow of dread and death is over them. Again, in the latest period, the practical has supervened, and the ideal is a little less evident than formerly. It is in the middle period that we see the idealism most clearly. It goes hand in hand with his optimism. The ultra idealism of the second period seems to be the result of a naturally idealistic nature, that has suffered strangely little from the external blows of fortune. The whole tone of it is cheering and encouraging, and though perhaps the suffering struggler is apt to feel that a message of hope and comfort is of more practical value when the comforter has himself parried the worst strokes of misfortune, yet no one can forget in reading Maeterlinck that the mental struggle, often the hardest of all, had been raging in him from youth up, till at last he found the optimistic and idealistic philosophy which he offers to others with both hands.

When we feel inclined to blame him for his ultra-

idealism—as, for instance, when he says that the soul can mount, but never descend—justice forces us to stop and ask: Who has, after all, tested the essence of the soul? Who knows assuredly, beyond the possibility of doubt, the amount of soul-development that goes on in the world, through what are outwardly propitious or adverse circumstances? Who can judge?

In the essays on Ruysbroeck, Novalis, Emerson, in the allusions to Plotinus, Swedenborg, Carlyle, to Shakespeare and the other Elizabethans, this same tendency to idealise is seen. Particularly with regard to the mystics, of whom, in early days, Maeterlinck was so devout a follower, do we see this idealisation of his subject. His optimism finds what is best in the object of study, and he idealises, until each in turn is placed upon the altar of hero-worship. Nor does the eulogium of one essay efface that of another; the way is strewn with altars, at each of which Maeterlinck has offered up his best self to one whom he considered a master. In the pages of *Le Trésor des Humbles* all the mystic philosophers appear encircled with a halo.

In the more scientific work, *La Vie des Abeilles*, the spirit of idealisation is present also; this time it is not men who are idealised, but bees. One would almost imagine M. Maeterlinck, avocat, held a brief for the bee, so enthusiastic does he become in his advocacy of it and its republic and its ways.

In *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, he treats as enthu-

siastically and admiringly of the flower-world as he had formerly done of the world of the hive.

Again, with all the philosopher's desire for the good, with all the artist's enthusiasm for the beautiful, Maeterlinck boldly declares that true drama must be a species of idealisation. To the so-called realists Maeterlinck refuses to belong; for to him drama is idealised reality. In his own words:—

> One cannot deny it, and the poetic instinct of humanity has always felt it to be so: a drama is not really true unless it is greater and more beautiful than reality.[1]

V. Poetic Functions.

Every true poet holds a very clear idea of what the mission of the poet is. That idea, of necessity, gives the tone to his work. We find Maeterlinck condemning Ibsen for suggesting that there is justice in the punishments of heredity. The Norwegian poet certainly does not go far in this direction, but Maeterlinck does not agree with even the length to which he goes. Poets, he says, may be allowed to make hypotheses and take a step farther than reality. But, as a matter of fact, they are often under the delusion of ushering in a new truth when they are simply on the trail of a lost illusion.[2] If a poetical hypothesis is to have any truth and any value, it must, of necessity, not be contradicted by everyday experience. Otherwise, it becomes useless, dangerous, and even lacking in honesty.

[1] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, p. 197. [2] *Le Temple Enseveli*, p. 161.

True poetry, Maeterlinck states in the Preface to his *Théâtre*,[1] is composed of three principal elements: first, verbal beauty; second, passionate contemplation and depiction of what really exists around us and in us; and third, and most important, the idea that the poet makes for himself of the unknown in which float the beings and things that he evokes, and of the mystery dominating and judging them and presiding at their destinies. A beautiful poem rarely deals solely with the things of this world; almost invariably what gives it its nobility is some allusion to the mystery of human destiny, some suggestion of a new bond between the visible and the invisible, between things temporal and things eternal. Now the lyric poet may or may not be troubled by the radical change which our notion of the unknown has undergone in these latter days; the dramatic poet certainly is essentially affected by it.

The lyric poet may theorise about the unknown; he may keep to general and not too precisely formulated ideas; he does not need to consider their practical consequences. He does not require to give an exact name to the mysterious and unknown powers of the universe. What we ask of him is to arouse in us the impression of immensity and terror that he himself has felt thrill through him when his life went out to meet the life of the universe. But the dramatic poet cannot limit himself to such general ideas. His conception of the unknown he must take with him into real life, the

[1] P. x..

life of every day. He must show us how the higher powers, the infinite principles in the universe, act on our destinies; in what form, under what conditions, according to what laws, and to what end. As, at the present time, the powers and principles believed in of old are no longer admitted in the same way, the dramatic poet of to-day finds himself in a strange difficulty; and, if he wishes to be absolutely sincere, he must confine himself to reality, and study material and psychological effects. The result may be to give to the world fine works of observation, passion, or wisdom, but there will be lacking the sense of the infinite which made the dramas of old such noble productions. Must the dramatic poet, then, forgo the beauty that resulted from this consciousness of infinity? Maeterlinck replies in the negative; if the poets of to-day have not succeeded in replacing the old ideas by new ones of a more developed consciousness, those of to-morrow will do it.

Two poets seem to have shown the way already, Ibsen and Tolstoy, but their manner of guidance is strange, and the guiding light flickers wildly. When the age attains a clearer idea of the universe, when the conceptions of our fathers are replaced by definite conceptions of our own, this sense of infinite greatness will once more pervade dramatic poetry. But till then, Maeterlinck pleads, let us not fill the empty space with earth-born phantoms; let us keep its place for the idea of the infinite.

We see the philosopher and the artist temporarily at war in Maeterlinck as regards beauty *versus*

moral teaching; in him the ethical and the æsthetic plead each its own cause. This is the point that he reaches: a poem should not sacrifice its beauty to moral teaching, but if, without losing anything of its beauty, internal or external, it leads us to truths that are as admirable as, and, at the same time, more encouraging than, the truth that leads to nothing, it will have this advantage, that it will fulfil a double duty.[1] When we remember that in Maeterlinck truth tends to merge into beauty, particularly if it be ethical truth, ethics and æsthetics appear both to be satisfied.

Maeterlinck's conception of the poet is by no means a purely æsthetic one; it is rather that of the peoples of old, who saw in their poet the prophet, the seer, the guide of the race. To Maeterlinck the poet is foremost in the search for truth, most zealous in his declaration of it, when he chances to find it, noblest and broadest, loftiest and most eloquent in his expression of it. He is the makar as well as the prophet. Maeterlinck speaks of "the man of a thousand duties" who lives in the poet.[2]

According to our author, one of these duties is not that of the perpetual correction and polishing of his works, whether they be prose or poetry. His own style of working seems to be that of maturing his subject beforehand in quiet contemplation, and then writing it down, practically, in its final form. In the Preface to his *Théâtre* he tells us that he hardly modified his early plays at

[1] Preface to *Théâtre*, p. vii. [2] *Le Temple Enseveli*, p. 115.

all for this new edition. Not that they seemed to him perfect—

> but a poem is not improved by successive corrections. The best and worst mingle their roots in it, and often, in trying to disentangle them, one would lose the special emotion and the light and almost unexpected charm that could only flourish in the shadow of a fault that had not yet been committed.[1]

Herein Maeterlinck differs essentially from Stevenson, to whom we have several times likened him, as Stevenson was perpetually polishing and correcting.

Stevenson attained a jewel-like finish in his style, which Maeterlinck shares, although those somewhat similar styles are the result of entirely opposite methods. It was Stevenson, and not Maeterlinck, who rigorously followed the advice of their French literary predecessor: *Polissez-le et le repolissez!*

The sense of form and balance of phrase was a more essential part of Maeterlinck's literary equipment; it was brought to perfection by the Belgian with infinitely less labour than by the Scottish writer. It belongs, as a quality, more to the Southern than to the Northern races, and is therefore attained by the Germanic languages with much greater difficulty than by the descendants of the Latin tongue. Maeterlinck's perfection of form was a heritage from his Southern ancestry.

[1] Preface to *Théâtre*, p. 1.

CHAPTER IX

MAETERLINCK'S PLACE IN MODERN THOUGHT AND LITERATURE

Difficulty of judging contemporary—Is Maeterlinck ephemeral?
His contribution to philosophy.
His contribution to science.
His contribution to poetry.
His contribution to prose literature.
Originality.
Maeterlinck as educative force.
His public—present and future.

WHEN one is in the midst of events in their rapid swirl it is difficult to judge of their ultimate momentousness to human nature, of their importance even to the next generation of men and women. One unconsciously assigns to those events in which one takes part, either as actor or spectator, a value different from that which one sets on events that have already become historic, and have, so to speak, judged themselves in the course of time. To a great extent the case is the same with one's contemporaries, even in the domain of literature. One can assign a certain value to their works, relative to contemporaneous writers, and, to some extent, relative to those that have gone before. But few can judge which among these

that shine around us to-day will stand the test of time, or whose light will continue to burn steadfastly for the coming world when the rest have flickered out in darkness.

If we who would fain criticise, and, it may be, condemn, our contemporaries could only mount to the summit of one of the hills of Time, and see the gorgeous array of genius that stretches into the future beyond the power of vision, as we can look back on that magnificent procession the beginnings of which are lost in antiquity, what surprises might not greet our sight! We will-o'-the-wisps might see the lamp of genius, kindled by those of whom we thought little in our day, burning steadily all down the centuries when our own little candles had long since died out black and cold! To see and judge with the perspective of time would change many a hasty criticism of our own contemporary literature. It is only time that decides what works will be handed down to future ages, and what works will perish in the days that saw their birth.

As we have not this means of judging, we must set standards for ourselves conformable with our powers of vision and understanding. We can pass no final decree, but every quantum of appreciation and sympathy and knowledge will be required to make our temporary judgment of any avail.

"Is Maeterlinck ephemeral?" has been asked; and the reply has been "yes" and "no." The question is best answered in Scottish fashion, by

asking another, What has he done that deserves remembrance?

Philosophy.

We have looked at his philosophy in more or less detail, and alongside a little that does not satisfy we have found much that satisfies and helps and stimulates. We have seen Maeterlinck as a follower of the mystics, a rejecter of the conventional, a lover of justice and truth and beauty, above all, a mingling of ancient and modern thought. Therein lies for us his principal value: he has brought the remote and abstruse into the conventionally modern sphere of thought, and there has made his philosophy pass current.

He is the most spiritual of modern writers; and while opposing the authority and dogma of any Church, he is infinitely less materialistic than many of those who profess to be the spiritual guides of the people. His idealistic optimism, whatever be its flaws when examined in detail, is, taken on the whole, an encouraging and stimulating attitude of mind.

He has founded no system—he cannot be called a metaphysician; he is not a Kant nor a Spinoza, not a philosopher for philosophers but a philosopher for those of the people who are willing to think. Nor does he aim at popularity; he is too great a lover of truth for that; he writes straightly and simply because he has a straight and simple message to give to his generation. He, beginning in his early works by placing Death

upon the throne of the Infinite, has ended, not only by stripping Death of all the funeral pomp and gloomy pageantry with which successive ages have adorned her, but by proving her a kindly and philosophic friend, to be welcomed because of the gifts of wider knowledge and nobler consciousness that she brings.

Science.

Maeterlinck, we saw, does not pretend to be a rigid scientist, either practical or theoretical; he makes no claim to be a pioneer of scientific discovery. In his works on bees and flowers he states simply and with infinite grace the results of his own observations in the world of insect and plant life. *La Vie des Abeilles* has the charm of pure literature joined to the exactness of science and the speculative mind of philosophy. It helps to bridge a gulf between science and poetry—a gulf that the ordinary imagination had declared nothing would ever bridge. With the vision of his genius, Maeterlinck saw that the scientific and the poetic imagination are akin. And so he painted them in *La Vie des Abeilles* and *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, with the result that neither science nor poetry will claim either for its own! They will go down to posterity unlabelled, uncaged.

Literature.

It is both as essayist and dramatist that Maeterlinck will be remembered. It is extremely likely

that the justice of time will bury the *Serres Chaudes* beneath the *saules pleureurs* and the *cyprès* of *Princesse Maleine* or the ruins of the marble hall of the *Sept Princesses*, or that these pieces will merely interest generations of future readers as the juvenilia of the author. The delicate, mystical flavour of the other pieces is in them all, but the lasting quality, that which gives value to a piece in the age to come, does not suggest itself strongly in these. It is interesting to notice that the works of which that can be said are all among Maeterlinck's earliest: a clear indication of unchecked progress towards possession of one's world.

As a dramatist, Maeterlinck is neither a Shakespeare nor a Racine. He is a product of his age: he has modern idealism, against a background of the mediæval and fantastic, the simple or the picturesque. He shows marvellous insight into human character and understanding of human needs. Although the dreamlike nature of his plays troubles many a practical mind, or mind more bent on action, yet the gracious sweetness of the women who move through his scenes is neither local nor temporal, but typical of a poet's conception of women of any place and time. The plays, except *Monna Vanna* and *Marie Magdeleine*, are hardly objective; the poet has been blamed for being too much in them all. That he is there is undoubted, but not to the extent that every character is merely a phase of Maurice Maeterlinck. As it has been said that there

is no good historian who is not partial, so there is no good dramatist who does not make himself live in part in all his creations. A man's personality always counts for much in all that he does and in all that he writes. There are no two persons who would tell a story in the same way.

As he wrote from year to year, Maeterlinck continued to formulate his ideas on drama; he modified, partly consciously, partly unconsciously, it would seem, his ideas on the static drama, the most characteristic of his pieces that follow out his static theory being all early plays: *L'Intruse*, *Les Aveugles*, and *Intérieur*. The public was not ready for the play of soul rather than of physical action, so Maeterlinck, while remaining in theory true to his ideal, in practice gave the public his message in a form in which it would be better understood. The poet's message throughout is that of the importance of the spiritual rather than the material, of the soul rather than the body. The atmosphere, from *Maleine* to *Marie Magdeleine*, is essentially Maeterlinckian: the shimmering blue searchlight of the philosophical seeker after truth and beauty will burn as long as Ibsen's fierce red flame of revolt against convention and hypocrisy and public lies that cloak themselves as benefits.

Regarding it as the poet's duty to be the seer and guide rather than the voice of his times, Maeterlinck stands upon the pinnacle of the ideal, and seeks to draw gently to him all who will come.

He does not talk down from the heights: he prefers rather to consider all men as on the same plane.

In his prose work he is still the poet-philosopher, the practical visionary, if one might so couple words. As an essayist, he is unrivalled in modern French literature. The grace and charm of his prose springs chiefly from its simplicity and naturalness. English and American literature furnishes us with more parallels than does French: Lamb, Stevenson, Hazlitt, Emerson, Carlyle, he has a touch of them all, with perhaps a little of De Quincey too.

Maeterlinck has made literature of philosophy and science. With his own indescribable charm he has thrown open the doors of deeper thought to many a student of literature; he has shown where to seek for the good things of the soul, and has, at the same time, satisfied the desire for beauty of form and music of verbal expression. He is at his best in the short essay form of composition; he has the consummate art of rounding rapidly to a finish, without allowing the reader to feel the swiftness of the motion.

He has helped to open a new era in the thought of Europe, the period of soul-development which came as a reaction to the materialism that threatened to swamp the fields of modern philosophy. His genius is less that of intense originality than of intense insight and appreciation. As the poet-prophet warned his generation long ages since, there is nothing new under the sun.

The beginnings of thought, as of things, are not in time, but in eternity.

With the faculty that genius has of understanding the needs of its age, Maeterlinck saw the spiritual need of a return to mysticism in its purest form: the search for truth in the things of the spirit, to throw light on the things of matter. He has brought together all that is best and most helpful in the mystic philosophy of the past, filtered it through his own sympathetic and discriminating brain, and added to it from his own philosophically speculative mind. He has thrown the light of modernity upon past mysticism, and re-presented the scattered fragments in such a way as to make a united chain of thought. In his philosophy there is nothing that is startlingly new; there is, on the whole, less originality of matter to wonder at than extreme attractiveness and clarity of presentation to admire.

With regard to his dramas, the case is different. While his essential cast of mind is philosophic, his originality has shown itself more in his plays than in his philosophical essays. Whence this paradox? The reason is not far to seek: it is the philosopher in the dramatist that revolutionises the drama. He practises his philosophy in his plays, and would have practised still more had the public been ready for it.

Although the theory of the Static Drama was not originally *his*, as we saw, he was the first dramatist of any power to try to put into effect such a theory —sometimes with startling results. The greatest

of the young Belgian school as he is, he has set an example that others have followed with less success, just as, in the early days, he was less successful in following out the example of others than in devising and executing his own plans. Whatever may be the verdict of the future on the work of Maeterlinck, no one can deny that he has served his day and generation. It is to be hoped that the future will also be able to read his message.

For the present age, it is a supremely educative force, all the more so that it is not over the head of the average reader. It is a proclamation of the necessity of truth and justice and beauty for the soul of man, as well as for his physical condition. It is a crusade against shams and lies, akin to Ibsen's, but very differently worked out. It is a declaration of the ultimate good in every human soul, and of the infinite possibilities of development. Putting extravagances and inconsistencies aside, it is a gospel of courageous optimism, of noble idealism in spite of every obstacle. It is spiritualism as opposed to materialism; it is progress for man and woman; it is the development of all the intellectual faculties, and of soul-instinct above brain-instinct. Understood aright, it is, together with the message of Ibsen and that of the modern Russian genius, one of the most educative forces of these latter days.

The public was as shy of Maeterlinck as he was of it; at the beginning it was half-afraid, half-attracted, by Mirbeau's flourish of trumpets. His

extravagant praising of the young author was, from one point of view, the most unfriendly turn the critic could have done him, as it raised a sneer in the place of a wondering interest. Maeterlinck has been strong enough to live down the false eulogiums, which did not give any real pleasure to him, and to present himself before his readers in more unmistakable guise. He has captured the theatre-going public in this country more by the *Blue Bird* than by anything else. Those who can discriminate between bad and good are his attentive, if not always admiring, auditors; for those who cannot discriminate nothing need be said. The thinking public reads Maeterlinck with interest; the non-thinking passes him by.

It is extremely likely that in the next age Maeterlinck will have more readers and auditors than to-day, for his spirit is progressive. The following age will produce still more, until those ideas which he has promulgated have become current coin—or have grown too old-fashioned for those who devour the ever-new. Even then the intense charm of his style will always attract a host of readers, those who delight in pure literature being kindred artist-souls, whether they are capable or incapable of expression.

After having enjoyed Maeterlinck's beauty to the full, let us not have the baseness to complain of him because he is not a Victor Hugo nor a Goethe, not a Shakespeare nor even a Bacon. To few is it given to be all things to all men.

He does not claim to have accomplished great

things: it is his disciples who claim that for him.

He modestly sums up his mission thus:—

> Je n'ai rien ajouté à tout ce qu'on savait. J'ai simplement tenté de séparer ce qui peut être vrai de ce qui certainement ne l'est point; car, si l'on ignore où se trouve la vérité, on apprend néanmoins à connaître où elle ne se trouve pas. Et peut-être, en recherchant cette introuvable vérité, aurons-nous accoutumé nos yeux à percer, en la regardant fixement, l'épouvante de la dernière heure.[1]

[1] *La Mort*, p. 270.

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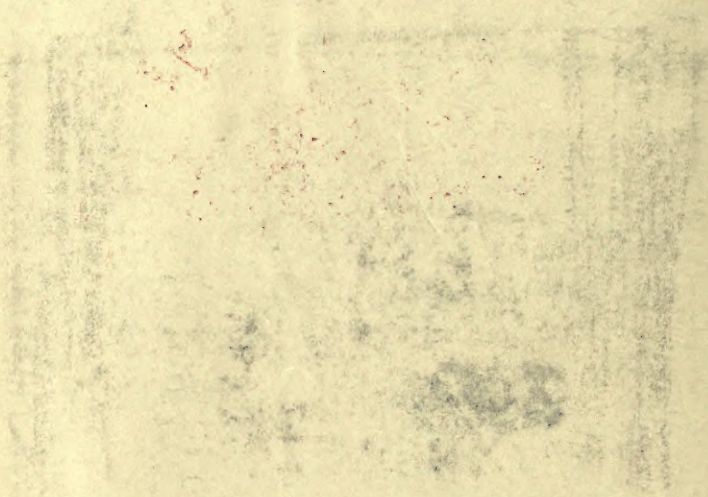

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